

sourceful. I think his allround excellence in games had something to do with that. He was a good footballer, half-back, a good bowler, batsman and fielder at cricket, also a good fisherman and shot. But he was above all an excellent mountaineer.

In 1884 my brother Charles was married, and I had been crushed by a rock in Piers Ghyll and lay for six weeks at Wastwater recovering. So ended our guideless climbing. But one's love for mountain scenery not only remained but increased.

The best mountain scenery lies below the top of the mountains, and those who undertake strenuous climbs are apt to miss the full beauty of the mountains. Two scenes I shall never forget. These I saw shortly after my marriage in 1890. The first was when my wife and I stood looking down on to the valley near the top of the Col de la Lauze. A thunderstorm was going on beneath us, at the same time another had broken out on the Aiguille du Plat and yet another on Les Ecrins. I never saw the peaks of Dauphiné in such a weird savage light as that.

The other scene was a very different one. We were crossing the Col du Géant from the S.; we went up slowly by moonlight, taking a mule with us as far as we could. When we reached the top of the col we watched the daylight dawn. The peaks of the Graians to the S. rose out of the purple gloom; along the wall of the great Swiss mountains, past the Matterhorn, came the rosy flood lighting the snows of Mont Blanc above us. Altogether a scene of perfect beauty and peace.

THE EARLY ATTEMPTS ON MONT BLANC DE COURMAYEUR FROM THE INNOMINATA BASIN

(Concluded.)

9. MARSHALL, 1874 (INNOMINATA ROUTE)

J. A. GARTH MARSHALL had been a member of that happy party which discussed possible new ways to Mont Blanc on the meadows of Courmayeur in 1873. W. E. Davidson said of him, perhaps too sweepingly: 'Unless a thing was difficult . . . he did not care to try it,' and Marshall was certainly strongly attracted to the problem of an ascent of Mont Blanc by its southern flanks, which he put to the test in 1874. We have seen that in the previous year he had been Kennedy's companion on the ascent of the 'Lower point of the Péteret' and probably also in a visit to the Brenva Glacier. It is in any case significant that, as Kennedy also, he now turned rather to the Innominata basin, taking the services of Johann Fischer over from Kennedy in addition to those of his own guide, Ulrich Almer. They

all went up to a bivouac in that basin, made their attempt, and returned. When about to quit the Brouillard Glacier a few seconds after midnight and within a hundred feet of safety, the whole party fell into a crevasse by the breaking of a wide snowbridge. Marshall and Fischer lost their lives, but Almer, whose fall had been broken, was able to climb out next morning. We have to deal here with the attempt, and not with the sad accident, but this much must be said of the latter: Leslie Stephen and Gabriel Loppé visited the place with Ulrich Almer immediately after the event and found that the crevasse gave no indication of its presence, the disaster thus having been due to pure mischance.⁶⁵

Marshall's career may be said barely to have commenced when it was thus brought to an end, but it had already given promise of exceptional accomplishment. In 1872, his first season of climbing, he had been taken by Kennedy on the first ascent of the Aiguille de Leschaux, whilst he had accompanied Kennedy in the following year, thus sharing in the first passage of the Col des Hironnelles amongst other expeditions, as we have seen before. In 1874, his third season, he had already made a new pass near the Dammastock and two other more notable expeditions. Of the latter, the first was a new ascent of the Aletschhorn (from the N.) followed by a new descent to the S., and the second was the first ascent of the Aiguille de Triolet (from the Glacier de Pré-de-Bar).⁶⁶ Accompanied by his cousin, F. E. Marshall, he had started with Johann Fischer as sole guide on August 5 with some training climbs which included the new pass. Then they were joined by Ulrich Almer on August 13, traversed the Aletschhorn, crossed the Rothorn from Zinal to Zermatt, and reached the Italian Val Ferret, improving the previous way over the Col de Sonadon during their journey. There, F. E. Marshall left the party and descended to Courmayeur, whilst the others slept at Pré-de-Bar on August 25 and made their ascent of the Aiguille de Triolet next day, then rejoining F. E. Marshall at Courmayeur, from which the latter crossed the Col du Géant with Séraphin Henry on August 28. That day or the day following may possibly have been used for an examination of the Innominata face and basin from such view point as the S. bounding ridge of Val Veni or the Crammont.

Marshall set out from Courmayeur between 9 and 10 A.M. on August 30 with Johann Fischer and Ulrich Almer, their intention being to ascend that day only so far as a bivouac in the Innominata basin.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *A. J.* 7. 111.

⁶⁶ *A. J.* 7. 112. 'We thought the ascent from this side difficult,' as Marshall wrote in a letter [quoted in Ulrich Almer's *Guide's Book*]. My own party more or less repeated this fine ascent in 1933, without having previously planned it and being misled by local information into thinking that it was new.

⁶⁷ Most accounts of Marshall's expedition follow that given by Kennedy (*A. J.* 7. 110), who did not have his information at first hand from Ulrich Almer, and merely surmised that the line taken was similar to that which he himself had intended to take earlier in the season. Additional information is given in a letter written by Almer and published at the time in the *Leeds Mercury* (reproduced in *The Times* of September 17; a similar account appeared in the

In 1932, I found a very old bivouac place in the rocks of the lower part of the S. arête of Punta Innominata a little below the point at which that arête, in its descent, changes direction from S. to S.E., thereafter running down parallel with the lower end of the Brouillard ridge. Some weatherworn firewood still lay there, and this bivouac, across which a leaf of rock had more recently fallen, must certainly have been that first made by Marshall's party and reoccupied in the following year by Eccles, who describes the place correctly as 'overlooking the head of the little Glacier de Châtelet.'⁶⁸ This bivouac may be attained in about seventy minutes from the Gamba hut, and it was reached by Marshall's party in about five hours from Courmayeur.⁶⁹

They set out again at 2 A.M. on August 31, and probably reached the Brouillard Glacier by a brief and easy descent from the inner end of a short snow arête above which, about thirty minutes from the bivouac, the rocks of the arête first begin to become interesting. The route of ascent up the glacier itself was chosen, and they moved much faster than did Kennedy's party (Andreas Fischer), as was natural in the case of a smaller and unladen party travelling on the hard snow of early morning, even if in darkness.

It is agreed by all that the first point which they made for was what we now know as Pic Eccles, whether their subsequent intention was to attempt a direct ascent of the Innominata face above it or to traverse and ascend by or near Eccles' subsequently successful route. The attempt was destined to fail at 4 P.M., the party being forced later on to await the rise of the moon at a place which Kennedy describes as 'the ridge at the head of the two glaciers' (that is, Col Eccles or Pic Eccles). This description, together with the fourteen hours which had elapsed before they were stopped and the fact that they were turned back by actual rock difficulty (there being no difficulty of such a standard on Pic Eccles⁷⁰), all show without shadow of doubt that Marshall's

Swiss Times on September 19, 1874). Durier (*Le Mont Blanc*, 3rd edition, 1881, p. 397) derives his information in part from Kennedy and in part from a letter in *L'Italia*, September 3, 1874. Andreas Fischer (*Hochgebirgswanderungen*, 2nd edition, 1924, especially pp. 33, 34, and 112) had first hand information from Ulrich Almer. The following account is derived from these different sources.

⁶⁸ *A. J.* 8. 410.

⁶⁹ G. E. Foster, in *Pioneers of the Alps* (Cunningham and Abney), 1887, p. 137. (Probably from Almer directly.)

⁷⁰ The obvious route to Pic Eccles from near the Col du Fresnay lies up a snow shelf which curls steeply up to the right and round to the N.E. flank of the peak, which is finally reached from that side. This line is almost entirely on snow after the S.E. arête is quitted. Marshall's party may have taken it, as Eccles certainly did in 1877, and most subsequent parties have done. The other possible ways are by the Brouillard (S.W.) flank or up the S.E. arête direct. In 1919, Courtauld and Oliver used the former, traversing under the actual summit to reach Col Eccles (*A. J.* 33. 129), as also did Courtauld, Finch, and Oliver on their way to Eccles' route in 1921 (Finch: *Making of a Mountaineer*, 1924, p. 287). So far as I can ascertain, my own party in 1932 is the only one which has ascended Pic Eccles directly by its S.E. arête. There is one short but difficult rock step just below the summit which called for roping down on the subsequent descent. No rock which is encountered on any of these routes would stop a good party.

party attained (and passed) Pic Eccles, thus making its first ascent. In 1932, my party reached Pic Eccles in daylight, but over recently fallen snow, in a few minutes more than four hours of actual climbing from the Gamba hut (lower than the bivouac by more than an hour—say seventy minutes), whilst in 1933 we attained the peak in darkness, but under excellent snow conditions, in less than four hours and twenty minutes of movement. If ample allowance be made for halts, six hours *from the bivouac* to Pic Eccles would be much more than generous time for such a party as Marshall and his guides, who should thus have attained Pic Eccles at about 8 A.M. To be overcautious in this connexion, even so late an hour as 10 A.M. may be admitted as that at which the party may have gone on from Pic Eccles.⁷¹

To take the latter estimate, they must then have continued their climb for at least another six hours (with halts), before they were finally stopped at 4 P.M. Almer estimates that they were then about two hours below the summit—a guess which nevertheless indicates that they must have reached a considerable height. Andreas Fischer gives this height as halfway up the face. It is important that they were stopped by the actual difficulty of the rocks. The place itself must have been impossible, and it cannot have presented any obvious alternative which did not involve a long *détour* with questionable outcome, or else a party which considered itself to be so near success would never have retreated down rocks which must have been long and difficult. Almer says: 'We came to a place where it was impossible to go any farther, we found not time enough to look out for another place to go farther.' They were therefore forced to descend by the rocks which they had ascended, and Andreas Fischer tells us that this descent made an extraordinary impression on Almer's memory, a sure indication of the severe nature of the work. It must have been a serious impasse which forced such a retreat.

Almer continues: 'We settled down to return as quick as possible. It became dark as we were still high in the rocks; we were obliged to stand still and wait for the moonlight for about an hour and a quarter; when the moonlight began we were quite frozen. It was so cold we could not bear to stay there all night, so we began our descent again slowly, and we walked down on rocks and glacier of Brouillard till midnight.'

This certainly reads as if they halted in easier rocks not far above the glacier, and the lowest rocks of the S.E. *arête* of Pic Eccles would seem to be indicated on all counts. August 27 had been the night of the preceding full moon (the moon rose a few minutes after sunset that night), and moonlight may perhaps have 'begun' sufficiently for their purpose somewhere about 10.30 P.M. on August 31. The descent from the lowest rocks of Pic Eccles to the place of the present accident (at midnight), occupied my party for exactly one hour (including two halts), in 1932, when we came down in daylight but under bad conditions. Marshall's party would certainly move slowly, but as certainly

⁷¹ See also p. 149 here.

it would not linger, and a descent of about one and a half hours may be held to suit the circumstances. We are probably not far wrong in assuming that the party halted on the lower rocks of Pic Eccles from about 9.45 P.M. (or perhaps a little earlier) to about 10.30 P.M. We have, therefore, to account for a route capable of providing an impasse without obvious means of short circumvention; and the impasse must occur about six hours above Pic Eccles, whilst descent from it must occupy between five and six hours to near the Col du Fresnay, the latter part of the descent being in ever increasing darkness and the difficulty of the rocks being increased by freshly fallen snow.

Where then did they climb? Claude Wilson questioned Ulrich Almer on this point in 1920, when Almer's memory of the events was still vivid. The description given was that the party went up in the rocks of the Innominata face, bearing somewhat to the left, and 'soon' having to return ⁷² (but 'soon' hardly fits the facts, and Almer's contemporary estimate must be taken as meaning that they ascended more than a 'little' way). Still later, Claude Wilson wrote to me: 'My recollection [of the interview] is that they went up to the Col Eccles and then to the left and tried Mt. Blanc much where Oliver and Courtauld got up—or somewhere near it.'

There can, in fact, be little doubt that Marshall's party attempted to climb the Innominata face straight up from Col Eccles. It is true that Kennedy assumes their route to have been that which he himself projected (later taken by Eccles). But Kennedy did not have a close or clear view of the face during his own attempt, and may not have suspected the possibility of a more direct ascent. Andreas Fischer, who also seems to have thought that the line taken was by Eccles' successful route, was similarly denied a close view of the face (and of its possibilities), when he visited the Innominata basin in 1906 for the purpose, frustrated by the weather, of repeating Eccles' climb. Johann Fischer himself would see the face for the first time from a near point of view when he reached Pic Eccles on the present occasion, and it may have been there that the more direct route was adopted. Other evidence than that from Claude Wilson (who, it should have been said above, was very familiar with the basin), supports the probability that the more direct route was in fact attempted. It is thus significant that Almer nowhere hints at the steep descent on to the upper shelf of the Fresnay Glacier, the reascent of which during the retreat and in gathering darkness would surely have made a lasting impression. Again, had the party taken the exact line of Eccles' future ascent, it might have been stopped by dangerous snow, but scarcely by rock. Even more to the point is the fact that the rocks immediately to the left of Eccles' actual line do not seem to offer any sufficient impasse which could not be turned by a short *détour*. Such an impasse undoubtedly exists in the rocks on the line up from Col Eccles.

From that col, a steep, shallow, and broken rib ascends slightly to the left, ultimately reaching the upper Brouillard arête (or rather, the ter-

⁷² *A.J.* 33. 55 (footnote).

minal snow slope under its crest). This, sometimes wrongly called the Innominata ridge, has three major steps. The lowest must be ascended by climbing which is difficult if a direct but in part avoidable line be adopted, the second may be avoided on its flank by an apparently moderate ascent, and the third looks as if it were denied to such legitimate methods of climbing as were available in 1874. The Guglierminas were apparently stopped by ice difficulties on the first step at their attempt in 1916.⁷³ Courtauld and Oliver circumvented the second and third steps by traversing to a branch rib on the left during their successful ascent in 1919.⁷⁴ The Guglierminas, in repeating the climb in 1921, were stopped by the third step and had to traverse to the branch rib.⁷⁵ My party in 1933, having ascended to the right of the line previously taken and by a more direct and certainly a more difficult route, came more or less level with the base of the third step (but well to the right) in about three and a quarter hours of actual climbing from Col Eccles, our way having included the first step, taken directly. Had we ascended in the former line to the actual base of the third step the time taken would have been considerably shorter.

We may conclude that Marshall and his guides certainly made the first ascent of Pic Eccles and thereafter certainly ascended the rocks above Col Eccles in the line of the Innominata rib. The lowest point at which they might be stopped is the first step, which should be surmounted in a little more than an hour from Col Eccles. The second step may be avoided (as the Guglierminas avoided it in 1921), by a moderate traverse on its flank, and above that a party would certainly be stopped by the third step. Where Marshall's party may have been stopped is, of course, a matter of conjecture. But unless we assume that the party was inordinately slow on the approach (on the contrary, it was a fast party: Zermatt, for instance, had been reached from Zinal over the Rothorn that same season in ten hours⁷⁶), it is difficult to allow less than six hours (if even so little), for ascent above Pic Eccles, and as difficult to suppose that so long a time would be spent on the Innominata rib if the party were stopped on the first step. That time would fit an ascent to the base of the third step, as also would the duration of descent on the retreat, considerable halts in the former case being taken. Almer's high estimate for the level attained would appear to indicate the third step rather than the first, and in the absence of sufficient knowledge that conjecture may perhaps be permitted to stand.

10. ECCLES' EXPLORATION, 1875 (BROUILLARD ROUTE)

Andreas Fischer states that, in the years following the accident to Marshall's party, the problem of the ascent of Mont Blanc from the direction of the Brouillard Glacier was discussed by such great climbers as T. S. Kennedy, Leslie Stephen, and A. W. Moore, and by such great guides as Melchior Anderegg, Hans Jaun, and the Almers, but

⁷³ The Guglierminas: *Vette*, 1927, pp. 237, 243.

⁷⁴ *A.J.* 33. 129.

⁷⁵ *A.J.* 35. 87.

⁷⁶ *A.J.* 7. 112.

that all advised against its trial.⁷⁷ This can, however, scarcely have been the case. The accident itself had obviously nothing to do with the danger of the actual route. Kennedy himself certainly believed that the solution had been found although not executed, and in any case we find Eccles, who now appears for the first time in the story, visiting the Innominata basin at the first opportunity (as it were) after the accident—that is to say, very early in the following season.

James Eccles was a little older than such men as T. S. Kennedy, the younger Birkbeck, and Edward Whymper, but his real climbing career did not commence until four years after Whymper's serious climbing in the Alps ceased with the ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. For that reason, just as Whymper's early cessation tends now to make us associate him with the real pioneers, so the late commencement of Eccles' climbing leads us to place him almost after rather than with the great followers of those who founded our traditions. Eccles' career was a fine one, and we may note some of the less usual features in a record of which our knowledge is very far from complete. Save for as it were an isolated ascent of Mont Blanc in 1865, we first meet Eccles in 1869 when he made the first attempt on the Aiguille du Plan. In 1870 he made the first passages of the Col 'dit Infranchissable' and the Col du Toule. In 1871 came the first ascent of the Aiguille du Plan, and in 1873 those of the Petites Aiguilles de Triolet and the Aiguille de Rochefort. In 1875, besides the exploration of the Innominata basin here to be described, he made an attempt on Pic Central of La Meije from the S. We shall meet him again at the successful first ascent of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur (from the Innominata basin) in 1877, and during that season he made in addition the first passage of the Col de Rochefort and an improvement of the way across the Col de Trélatête at the third crossing of that fine pass, also on two occasions attempting the unclimbed Grépon. In the following year he visited the Rocky Mountains, making several ascents. In 1880 he made the first ascent of the Aiguille du Tacul, attempted the Grépon yet again, and was very nearly successful in an attempt to climb the Aiguille Verte from the Charpoua Glacier. In 1881 he made the first ascent of the Dôme de Rochefort and a new way up the Rossbodenhorn. We find him making variation routes up and down Piz Cherbadung even so late as 1890 when he was in his fifty-second year. In one of his earlier years he had made an attempt on the Fuorcla Tschierva-Scerscen, and he made some winter expeditions, then unusual, such as the ascent of the Wetterhorn in December 1881.⁷⁸

Eccles does not enter this history without connexion with the earlier discussion and attempts. He tells us ⁷⁹ that he had arranged to join Middlemore in an attempt on La Meije (Pic Central, from the La

⁷⁷ Fischer : *Hochgebirgswanderungen*, 1924, p. 112.

⁷⁸ See Mumm : *A.C. Register*, vol. 2, p. 120.

⁷⁹ *A.J.* 8. 409. Eccles' clear and excellent account of this and his ascent in 1877 forms the basis of what is given here. The paper is accompanied by an illustration on which the route of 1877 (the lower part of which was followed on the present occasion) is accurately marked.

Bérarde side) in 1875, but that at Middlemore's request he promised first to make an examination of the Innominata basin, before they met in Dauphiné, with a view to a projected attempt on Mont Blanc thereafter. As we have seen, Kennedy, one of the party which had debated the problems on the Courmayeur meadows in 1873, had attempted to solve the problem with Middlemore in 1874. Middlemore thus carried on the question to Eccles, and so forms the link between that occasion in 1873 and ultimate success.

Eccles, however, came to the problem with fresh eyes and an open mind, and it is interesting that his individual course followed those of his predecessors. Very early in July 1875,⁸⁰ he crossed the Col du Plan (so making the second traverse of that pass) and the Col du Géant to Courmayeur with his guide, Michel Clément Payot. They examined the Péteret ridge whilst crossing the Col du Géant, but Eccles came to the conclusion that the ascent of the ridge from the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur was denied by the steepness of the final part of the Péteret arête below the latter summit. He therefore turned to the Innominata basin.

They left Courmayeur at 10 A.M. on a subsequent morning (July 7 or earlier) with two additional porters for a bivouac from which what was intended to be an exploration but not an actual attempt was to be made on the following day. They entered the basin to the E. of the Aiguille du Châtelet, reached the Gamba alp, and went up the true left moraine of the Brouillard Glacier. From the glacier, not much higher, they ascended the first obvious couloir on to the rocks of the lowest part of the S. arête of Punta Innominata and found Marshall's bivouac a little higher up. There they settled for the night.

Leaving the bivouac at 3 A.M. next morning, Eccles and Payot crossed the ridge on to the Brouillard Glacier by what must have been the same small pass which was used by Kennedy and by Marshall, if not by Birkbeck also. Then they ascended the glacier in the line taken by Kennedy, which Eccles would know not only from the account, but also by word of mouth from Middlemore. In this manner, in about two and a half hours from the bivouac (say, at 5.30 A.M.), they reached the place from which Kennedy had turned up to the right towards Pic Eccles. From what may be identified as the small snow plateau on the flank of Pic Eccles a little higher than the Col du Fresnay, Eccles then made a careful examination with his telescope and decided, as Birkbeck must have done before him, on the Brouillard route by way of Col Emile Rey. The couloir which falls from Col Emile Rey did not look very difficult, but the rocks above the col looked very formidable. They, however, turned left to reach the col and examine these rocks more closely, at first having to descend slightly, as would

⁸⁰ Eccles does not give dates. He however crossed the Brèche de la Meije on July 12 preparatory to his attempt on La Meije. If we give him only one day in Courmayeur (to secure porters and prepare for the bivouac, but not for a distant examination), he can hardly have crossed the Col du Géant later than about July 5, and this is possibly too late a date to give even on the assumptions.

be necessary from that plateau. Reaching the upper shelf of the Brouillard Glacier, they ascended towards Col Emile Rey until 8 A.M., when they were close under the very steep rocks which descend direct to the true left edge of the couloir from the part of the face under Pic Luigi Amadeo. Here they could see that there was danger from stonefall, which would be serious during the subsequent descent, and they wisely resolved to stop. If the description (close under the rocks), the time of day, and the speed of this party, be taken into consideration, the point thus attained must have been that at which, on the first ascent to the col from this side (and subsequent traverse), the Gugliermas made their second bivouac at about the mid-height of the couloir in 1899.⁸¹ Eccles' description that they 'mounted *towards* the couloir' does not affect this conclusion, because the way thus far does not actually enter the couloir itself. It is almost certain that Birkbeck must have turned back at the same place, and for the same reason, in 1864.

Eccles and Payot therefore returned and crossed the upper shelf of the Brouillard Glacier parallel with the face until, at 9.30 A.M., they reached the foot of a rock rib which descended on that side from 'the highest point of the ridge [that between the two glaciers] which from the Broglia Glacier appears to be an isolated peak'—that is, Pic Eccles. During a halt there for breakfast, they made a careful examination of the part of the Innominata face above the Brouillard Glacier. Higher up, the face appeared to be practicable, but its lower 800 ft. was composed of smooth and very steep rock up which no way could be detected.

Having rested and eaten, they accordingly made straight up to Pic Eccles to examine the corresponding part of the face above the Fresnay Glacier, but they 'derived no encouragement from this quarter.' Eccles apparently did not detect the line which Marshall must have taken, and his preconception of the impracticability of the upper part of the Péteret arête blinded him (as he says) to the merits of the way which he was eventually to take. Having made this examination, the two of them left again at 11.30 A.M. and reached Courmayeur 'convinced of the hopelessness of an attempt from this side of the mountain.'

It should be noted in parenthesis that Eccles had left the same bivouac an hour later than Marshall, and had in nine and a half hours made a four hours' détour, halted for breakfast, reached Pic Eccles, and paused there for an examination. Had he gone straight for it, he might therefore have reached Pic Eccles at or before 7 A.M., and our former surmise that Marshall may have gone on from Pic Eccles so late as 10 A.M. (after an earlier start) certainly puts the hour too late.

To return to the present: so ended Eccles' remarkable expedition.⁸²

⁸¹ *Boll. C.A.I.*, 35. 223 (see marked illustration).

⁸² The peak thus ascended was subsequently named after Eccles. He is credited with its first ascent, but on a later occasion in 1877 (*e.g.* Kurz, *Mont Blanc*, 4th edit., 1935, p. 419). It is certain, however, that he had reached it in 1875 (as above), and almost equally certain that Marshall made the actual first ascent in 1874.

No doubt weighed down by that unfavourable conviction, Eccles did not in fact return to Courmayeur in 1875 so far as we know. But Middlemore came back, although there is no evidence that he revisited the Innominata basin. It is probably significant that he bivouacked on the Brenva Glacier, perhaps with high intentions, but thence traversed 'Les Flambeaux' ⁸³ to Chamonix on or about July 22. It was after that date that he attempted the Argentière face of the Aiguille Verte with Lord Wentworth. Its attraction proved to be strong, and he succeeded there in the following year. In 1875 he concluded with his fine attempt on the Finsteraarhorn.

II. ECCLES' FIRST ATTEMPT, 1877 (PÉTERET ROUTE)

Despite his unfavourable conviction, it was Eccles who returned to the attack, and he did so as the result of a curious accident.⁸⁴ During the autumn of 1875 whilst passing a shop in the Strand, he noticed a photograph of Mont Blanc which must have been taken from a point to the W. of the Crammont. The profile view of the Péteret arête showed him that its upper part was by no means so steep as he had thought, and a broad couloir was seen to descend the face from the point at which the steeper upper part of the arête first eases. The lower end of this couloir was hidden (probably by the intervention of the Aiguille Blanche de Péteret), but it seemed obvious that it must connect with the upper Fresnay Glacier.

Eccles therefore visited Courmayeur in July 1876 to put this to the test, but bad weather prevented him from making a visit to the Innominata basin (if only to examine the hidden part of the route), and he was even denied a view from the Crammont which might have confirmed what he had read in the photograph. Middlemore went to the Alps towards the end of that month and had better weather in August. But his interest was now captured by the Argentière basin, and he was rewarded by the fine first ascents of the Aiguille Verte and Les Courtes from that glacier. The first ascent of Les Droites (highest summit) and two new ascents in the Bernina group next occupied him, and he did not visit Courmayeur.

In 1877, Eccles was at last to win success, but not without further disappointments which were due to bad weather and may be related here before we describe his successful ascent. At the end of June or early in July, he was turned back by the weather in an attempt on the Grépon. Then, on July 10, he made the first passage of the Col de Rochefort to Courmayeur only to find that the conditions and weather prohibited his attempt. He therefore returned to Chamonix over the Col de Trélatête on July 12, making an improvement of the route

⁸³ *A.J.* 35. 273. The point attained has been taken to be the Aig. d'Entrèves (Kurz, *Mont Blanc*, 4th edit., 1935, p. 265). The circumstances and the brief description would rather seem to indicate a point on the frontier ridge W. of the Tour Ronde, or that peak itself.

⁸⁴ *A.J.* 8. 409.

during the descent, and bad weather thereafter frustrated another attempt on the Grépon. Soon, however, more promising conditions took him to Courmayeur again on July 20 across the Col du Géant. Again the weather broke, but he was fortunate enough to obtain a clear view from the Crammont, a careful examination with the telescope convincing him of the practicability of the Péteret arête.

At last he was able to set out, and so left Courmayeur with M. C. and Alphonse Payot as guides and two local porters at 3 A.M. on July 28 for as high a bivouac as possible in the Innominata basin. Taking the route of 1875, they passed Marshall's bivouac, crossed the small pass, ascended the Brouillard Glacier, reached near to the Col du Fresnay, and then went up to the lower rocks of Pic Eccles. Reaching these at 2.15 P.M., they there made their bivouac at about 12,400 ft. and probably a little higher than Kennedy's bivouac in 1874.

Eccles now sent the two guides up to Pic Eccles to examine the way. They ascended by the curving snow shelf on its N.E. flank and returned in less than two hours with the news that the way was certain, although the descent from Pic Eccles on to the upper shelf of the Fresnay Glacier might be difficult. It must have been a happy evening, but the party awoke next morning to heavily falling snow which forced a descent to Courmayeur. There was now, however, little doubt about the route, which was thus the way which Kennedy almost certainly would have followed had he not been stopped by similar bad weather in 1874. It is difficult to say which of all these great climbers most deserved success, but Eccles by this persistence under the worst possible conditions cannot have deserved it least, and all his tribulations were now at an end.

12. ECCLES' ASCENT, 1877 (PÉTERET ROUTE)

Eccles left Courmayeur at 6 A.M. on July 30 with Michel Clément Payot and Alphonse Payot. They reached their high bivouac on the rocks of Pic Eccles by their former route at 4 P.M., and there settled down for a night which was to be exceptionally cold but promised the best of snow conditions for the ascent next day.⁸⁵

Leaving their bivouac at 2.58 on the following morning, they reached Pic Eccles at about 4 A.M. by the route up its right flank. Then a steep and awkward descent by the rocks at the side of the E. couloir of Col Eccles, which left a strong impression, took them down to the upper shelf of the Fresnay Glacier, along which they went until they were under their proposed couloir of ascent at about 6 A.M.

There they paused for breakfast, this being the only considerable halt during the whole ascent and the first of only two pauses of any sort which they made. Going on again at about 6.20, they at first ascended by easy rocks to the W. of 'Eccles' couloir,' and then in the couloir itself, so attaining the crest of the Péteret arête above the Eckpfeiler and just below the steep upper part of the arête at 8.5. As they continued

⁸⁵ A.J. 8. 337, 416.

along the arête without pause, the angle rapidly steepened and two and a quarter hours of continuous step-cutting took them to a rock where they paused for five minutes at 10.20 to quench their thirst—the only pause on the whole ascent apart from the breakfast halt. More step-cutting took them up to another rock not far below the summit at 11.20, and after a final bout of step-cutting they overcame an easy cornice and stood on the summit of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, then reached for the first time, at 11.35.

The ascent had thus involved no more than eight hours and twelve minutes of actual climbing. That time, of which six and a quarter hours had been spent in step-cutting, may be reckoned to be equivalent to about eleven and a quarter hours from the Gamba hut, and it demonstrates very strikingly the extraordinary efficiency of this fine party, which moreover was to give further proof of its ability.

After a well earned halt of twenty minutes, Mont Blanc itself was reached in forty minutes at 12.35 P.M. Then another halt of the same duration was taken, only the fourth pause of any sort and to be the last. The summit was quitted at 12.55, and the party descended by the Bosses arête and the Grands Mulets to reach Chamonix at 4.40 P.M., in only three and three-quarter hours from the summit—an amazing feat for men who had spent the previous night in a high and cold bivouac and had made so great and exacting an ascent.

If the problem of the way to Mont Blanc from the Innominata basin had taken many years to solve and had eluded many great parties, the solution when it came was achieved in a manner which put a worthy crown on a worthy history. It may be granted that the conditions must have been exceptionally good—a spell of fine weather in a snowy season and a bitter night to provide hard snow on the morrow—but everything about this expedition was exceptional. The whole traverse from bivouac to Chamonix had been achieved in twelve and a half hours of actual movement (equal to about fifteen and a half hours from the Gamba hut), and this grand party had kept its stamina up to the very end. Quite apart from its novelty, this expedition must rank amongst the greatest. Such a feat requires to be remembered. It has rarely been excelled.

It must have seemed to the men of that time that Eccles had solved the great problem, but in truth he had only found one of the solutions and had only closed the first chapter of a longer story. His own route was to be extended by the inclusion of the lower summits of the Péteret ridge, the Brouillard arête was later to be won, and the Innominata face itself was at last to be ascended. Each of these subsequent aims was to have its own fine story of endeavour, but Eccles' ascent marks the end of the pioneer attempts, and here, after one other word, we may fittingly stop.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ The subsequent history of Eccles' route itself may be given briefly for completeness. In 1880, George Gruber set out to repeat it with Emile Rey, but mistook the route and attained the Col de Péteret direct from the head of

To the actors themselves, failures hold little of romance, and they usually receive scant or no mention, whilst we of a later generation tend to forget the frustrated attempts which have led to ultimate success, and thoughtlessly accept a first ascent as the beginning of the history of a route. In the present case, the early failures were really achievements which we may assess properly only if we remember the undeveloped technique of the day. It would be ungrateful to let these attempts pass into oblivion, because we now enjoy their fruits. Had men not been found to attempt such 'great routes' of modern standard long before the time was ripe, the earlier technique would have remained what it was—adequate enough for the usual ascents; and there would have been small cause to improve it to the level of efficiency necessary for these longer and more exacting expeditions. It was only the strongest and most adventurous climbers of their generation who could have brought themselves face to face with Mont Blanc from the Innominata basin under such conditions. If for no other reason, it has been a privilege to remember them here.

FOOTNOTES TO ALPINE HISTORY

By E. H. STEVENS

2. PORTRAITS OF WHYMPER

IN the admirable review⁹ of Mr. Smythe's biography of Edward Whymper—a review which is surely one of the best things ever written about Whymper—there is a striking comment on the early likeness of him that appeared in the *ALPINE JOURNAL* in February 1912. The reviewer, referring to 'the wonderful portrait of Whymper at twenty-five,' goes on: 'That face, so utterly unlike all later ones, is the face of a young Achilles or Alexander, sensitive, spiritual, shining with the

the lower basin of the Fresnay Glacier, thence ascending the Péteret arête with one bivouac upon it (Louis Kurz, *Guide to the Chain of Mont Blanc* (Climbers' Guides), 1892, p. 111). A few subsequent attempts on the route by the original line were frustrated by bad weather, and the third ascent in all was not accomplished until 1921, when Courtauld, Finch, and Oliver repeated the route by Eccles' line from a bivouac at Col Eccles (*A. J.* 34. 117, 170). In 1928, after a failure in 1926 with Bickhoff, the fourth ascent in all was made from the Gamba hut direct by August and Hugo Muller with Clavel, the original line of Eccles again being taken (*Die Alpen*, 6. 1). In 1932, Brauner and Fraisl more or less repeated Gruber's route (*Alpinisme*, 9. 470), but by the improved line which H. O. Jones had discovered in 1909 for an ascent of the Aig. Blanche de Péteret (*A. J.* 24. 577; 25. 510). To the best of my knowledge, these five ascents (thus including that of Eccles himself) are the only occasions up to the time of writing (winter, 1939) on which this fine route has been climbed—five ascents in sixty-two years!

⁹ *A. J.* 52. 150. Few, however, would agree with the reviewer that on the descent from the Matterhorn Hadow should have led down.