

ENGLISH TRAVELLERS IN THE GRAIANS

BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

THE *désobligeant* in which Sterne wrote the preface to his *Sentimental Journey* had twice been taken to pieces on Mount Sennis, and it might have suffered that fate a third time had not Sterne fallen out of conceit with it before ever the journey started. Did Sterne in fact cross the Col du Mont Cenis in his travels? The question is not very relevant to our purposes, for Sterne was less concerned with the features of the landscape than with those of his *connaissances de voyage*, and the *Sentimental Journey* ends with the adventure of the Piedmontese lady and the *fille de chambre* at the wayside inn some 5 miles from Modane. And that adventure happened not to Sterne himself but to his friend 'Fish' Crauford, and not 'between St. Michael and Madane' but on the road from Verviers to Aix-la-Chapelle—or so Crauford said.

It is irritating, it is even mildly infuriating, to the modest historian of this modest region of the Alps to think of the stream of English travellers passing through Modane and Lanslebourg in those days, and to find that scarcely one of them ventured to leave the high road, and that none pursued the track up the valley to Bonneval and its glaciers. It was in 1765 that Sterne made his journey; Windham and Pococke had 'discovered' Chamonix a quarter of a century earlier; and here were new glaciers to admire, new belvederes on which to picnic, and even peaks that could be climbed; and yet our travellers scurried over into Italy as fast as their porters' legs could carry them.

Coryat had made a more promising beginning in 1608. He at least 'observed an exceeding high mountain betwixt Lasnebourg and Nouvalaise, much higher than any that I saw before, called Roch Melow: it is said to be the highest mountaine of all the Alps, saving one of those that part Italy and Germany. Some told me it was fourteene miles high.'¹ And Coryat knew that there was a shrine on the top, built, he believed, by a certain fellow that had been a notorious robber and a very enormous liver.² But after Coryat, traveller after traveller passed that way with scarcely a moment's pause to stretch his legs and not a word of praise for cliffs or crags.

'I came directly from Turin to Geneva,' says Addison, 'and had a very easy journey over mount Cennis, though about the beginning of December, the snows having not yet fallen. On the top of this high mountain is a large plain, and in the middle of the plain a beautiful lake

¹ *Coryat's Crudities Hastily gobbled up in five Moneths travells in France, Savoy, Italy, etc.*, 1611.

² According to Ball, the triptych which reposed there in Coryat's time bears the inscription: 'Hic me apportavit Bonefacius Rotarius Astensis in honorem D.N.J.C. et Beatae Virginis. Anno Domini MCCCLVIII die 1 Septembris.'

which would be very extraordinary, were there not several mountains in the neighbourhood rising over it.' ³ Other travellers were even less enthusiastic. Thomas Nugent, for example, in his *Grand Tour through Europe* (1739), wrote: 'The country all through Savoy is very mountainous, and scarce contains any thing remarkable.'

It was in November 1739 that Gray and Walpole, 'swathed in beaver bonnets, beaver gloves, beaver stockings, muffs and bearskins,' ⁴ were carried over the pass in 'low armchairs on poles' by the porters, 'stepping from stone to stone with incredible swiftness in places where none but they could go for three paces without falling.' ⁵ Near Lanslebourg, Walpole's spaniel Tory ('the prettiest, dearest, fattest creature') had been carried off by a young wolf, although it was two o'clock, and broad sunshine. No wonder the fastidious Walpole disliked the landscape. 'Such uncouth rocks, and such uncomely inhabitants, My dear West, I hope I shall never see them again!' Even Gray, who could afterwards make fun of the incident, ⁶ was shaken: 'Mont Cenis, I confess, carries the permission mountains have of being frightful rather too far; and its horrors were accompanied with too much danger to give one time to reflect on their beauties.'

The poets and literary men, one must confess, are disappointing; but nevertheless at least one Grand Tour belongs to the history of Alpine travel. In 1751, the Earl of Fingal and Mr. Howard of Corbie were making the Tour in the company of their tutor, the Abbé Needham. ⁷ Whether the Earl and Mr. Howard were as enterprising as their tutor we do not know; but we do know that when the party reached Turin, the Abbé interrupted the smooth itinerary of the orthodox tour to make a very remarkable little excursion. The purpose of the expedition is explained in the title of a small brochure published at Berne in 1760: *Observations des Hauteurs, Faites avec le Baromètre, au mois d'Aoust 1751. Sur une partie des Alpes, en presence, et sous les auspices de Milord Comte de Rochford Envoye Extraordinaire de Sa Majesté Britannique à la Cour de Turin.* A charming little map shows the route taken by the party. From Turin they travelled by Ivrea, Aosta and St. Rémy to the Great St. Bernard. They next crossed the Col Serena to Courmayeur, and after going up the Allée Blanche to the Col de la Seigne, descended past La Ville des Glaciers to

³ Joseph Addison: *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy &c. in the years 1701, 1702, 1703, 1705.*

⁴ Horace Walpole: *Letters.* Edited by Paget Toynbee, 1903.

⁵ Thomas Gray: *Letters.* Edited by D. C. Tovey, 1909.

⁶ *Letters.* To Wharton: 'Proposals for printing by subscription the Travels of T: G: Gent: which will consist of the following particulars . . . Sets out the latter end of November to cross the Alps. He is devoured by a Wolf. How it is to be devoured by a Wolf. . . .'

⁷ John Turberville Needham, F.R.S. (1713-81). Needham was a Catholic divine, the son of a London barrister. He was the author of several works on microscopy, and was elected to the Royal Society in 1746/7. After some twenty years of continental travel and a fair amount of miscellaneous pamphleteering, he settled down to become Director of the Imperial Academy at Brussels.

Bourg St. Maurice. From Bourg St. Maurice they went up to the silver mines at Peisey⁸ and then crossed the 'Mont Tourné' to Entre deux Eaux and the Mont Cenis.

In the few references to Needham that occur in Alpine literature it is usually assumed that his 'Mont Tourné' is the Mont Pourri.⁹ It is clear enough, however, that like many early travellers, Needham used the word 'Mont' to describe a pass ('Mont Genève,' 'Mont Cenis,' etc.), and on his map he actually represented passes by little humps—for after all, the high ground over which he travelled was the high ground in which he was mainly interested. His description of the Mont Tourné, with higher 'lateral points' on each side, makes it quite clear that he is talking of a pass. There is no doubt that the one or two Alpine historians who have taken note of Needham's travels have been misled by the great height which he ascribes to his Mont Tourné. The fact is, that from the Great St. Bernard to La Ville des Glaciers, Needham's barometric observations and estimates of height are remarkably accurate (in no case does his error amount to more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.). Somewhere on the way down to Bourg St. Maurice, however, the usual air bubble must have made its way into the instrument, for Needham estimates Bourg St. Maurice at 1176 m. (instead of 815 m.) and the mines of Peisey at 2035 m. (instead of 1520 m.). His estimate of 3280 m. for the 'Mont Tourné' is therefore likely to be some five or six hundred metres too high.

Looking at the problem of the route from Needham's own point of view, it is obvious that if his party was to travel from Peisey to Entre deux Eaux they could not avoid following the mule track up to the Col du Palet (leaving the Col de la Tourne on the left) and then crossing the more or less level ground to the Col de la Lisse and descending the long Vallon de la Lisse to Entre deux Eaux. There is, indeed, no other route that does not involve crossing a great snowfield or descending into a deep valley.¹⁰ Needham's Mont Tourné is therefore

⁸ V. Barbier, in *La Savoie Industrielle* (1875) says that the exploitation of these mines was ceded to an English company as early as 1644. In 1734, two Englishmen named de Rive and Capson undertook the development of the mines; and from 1745 to 1760 the mines were worked by another English company, headed by Walter Grosset, Henry Scherdler and Mr. Savage.

⁹ Coolidge, in the 1898 edition of Ball, describes Needham's map as a map of the Pourri, and M. Paillon in the *Revue Alpine* (1895, p. 227) assumes that 'Mont Tourné' was one of the many early names for the Pourri, though he gives no reference for this name except Needham's pamphlet.

¹⁰ Gaillard has ingeniously argued (*Revue Alpine*, 1910, p. 289) that Needham may have turned off to the right just before reaching the Col du Palet and then, after taking his barometric observation on the 2900 m. col between the Rochers de Pramecou and the Aiguille Noire de Pramecou, traversed the snowfield of the Grande Motte to reach the Col de la Lisse. If this were indeed the route taken by Needham and Rochford, it would partly explain the fact that Stagnoni (who certainly knew of the expedition) introduced into his 1772 revision of Borgonio's map a direct route from Peisey to Entre deux Eaux crossing the 'Glacières de Plantery.' But there is usually some snow on the Col de la Lisse; and although Needham may well have told Stagnoni that he had crossed the 'Glacières de Plantery,' it does not follow that he had travelled nearly 4 km. over a snowfield at an altitude of very little less than 3000 m.

either the Col du Palet (2658 m.) or the Col de la Leisse (2780 m.). Not realising that his barometer was no longer reliable, Needham believed that he had reached a height of 1683 *toises* (3280 m.). In 1751, the only high mountains that had been climbed were the Rochemelon and the Titlis; and Scheuchzer had estimated the height of the Titlis at 1660 *toises* (3235 m.). It is not surprising that, seeing the Grande Motte on the right, and the Pourri or the Pointe de la Sana on the left, Needham wrote:

Comme le Mont-Tourné, sans considérer ses pointes latérales beaucoup plus élevées, auxquelles aucun observateur ne peut parvenir pour fixer son Baromètre, donne pour son élévation 1683 toises, il est à présumer, que le Mont-Tourné est la montagne la plus élevée de l'Europe. . . . Au moins jusqu'à présent aucune observation ne nous a donné une hauteur plus élevée en Europe.

Some time before reaching the Mont Cenis, Needham realised that his barometer was out of order: 'Avant d'arriver à cette dernière montagne, la descente assez dangereuse du Mont-Tourné avoit tellement dérangé mon Baromètre, qu'il n'étoit plus en état de me fournir des observations exactes . . .' and for his estimates of the height of the Mont Cenis he relied on some wildly inaccurate barometric observations communicated to him by the Father Superior at the Hospice. His figures for the height of the Mont Cenis (553 m.) and the 'Glacière de Ronce' (846 m.) are therefore too low. Needham himself seems to have felt the need for a word of explanation in view of the popular belief that the neighbouring Rochemelon was the highest mountain in the Alps,¹¹ and he points out that the amateur always tends to overestimate the height of the outlying portions of a *massif*.

It may seem surprising that in travelling up the Allée Blanche from Courmayeur Needham had not realised the immense height of the S. face of Mont Blanc; but an eye for distance and altitude is the product of experience (other people's experience as well as our own), and it was nearly thirty years after Needham's expedition that the Duke of Hamilton ran gaily across the Mer de Glace with the lighthearted

Needham's barometric observation is somewhat against Gaillard's theory. Even if we assume that no more air made its way into the instrument after Peisey, the maximum true height corresponding to Needham's calculated 3280 m. is 2800 m., which points to the Col de la Leisse rather than Gaillard's col or even the Passage de la Grande Balme. More probably still, Needham took his observation on the Col du Palet itself: it is an obvious high point, and after the descent towards the Lac de Tignes the rise to the vaguely defined Col de la Leisse is very gradual, and a traveller might easily fail to recognise a second col higher than the first. It is perhaps significant that George Keate, in *The Alps. A Poem*, 1763, includes 'Tourne' with St. Gothard, Cenis Mount, and Great St. Bernard in his list of perilous Alpine places.

¹¹ In the latter part of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth, there were continual references to the Rochemelon and to the annual pilgrimage to its summit, e.g. Samuel Sharp (1765), Marianne Starke (1792), John Sheppard (1816) and Marianne Colston (1819). 'All Switzerland may be seen from its summit,' says a traveller who crossed the Mont Cenis in 1818. The first recorded ascent by a traveller was that of the Seigneur de Villamont, who went up it 'avec des graffes de fer, que l'on a attachez aux mains et pieds,' in 1588; but there is no evidence of any ascent by an Englishman before 1863.

intention of filling in an idle hour at Montenvers by climbing the Dru.¹² If we venture to smile at Needham for his quiet assumption that he had crossed the highest mountain (or pass) in Europe, and if we venture to criticise him for not testing his barometer at Bourg St. Maurice, we must nevertheless acknowledge him as the pioneer of British Alpine travel—the first British traveller to leave the familiar highways, the first to pass 2500 m., and the first to attempt serious scientific measurements.

Needham's *Observations* were reprinted at intervals during the next eighteen years,¹³ and in 1772 we find him measuring the altitude of various places in Luxembourg; but there is no evidence that he ever extended his Alpine explorations, nor did his example stimulate other Grand Tourists to equip themselves with a portable barometer and a table of logarithms. Twenty-five years after Gray and Walpole, and more than ten years after Mr. Howard and the Earl of Fingal, we find Edward Gibbon (in April 1764) crossing the Mont Cenis in a light osier seat, carried by four men, just as his predecessors had done. 'Nothing could surpass the pleasantness of our passage over Mont Cenis. A very fine day, a most romantick variety of prospects, and a perfect consciousness that there could not be the smallest danger.'¹⁴ The tour is still the same, but change of tone is striking; was it simply the difference of season? Or the lapse of a quarter of a century? The exploits of Pococke, Windham, and Martel at Chamonix? Something of the enterprising spirit of the Abbé Needham stirring in the mind of the sceptical young historian? Or was it simply that Gibbon was writing to his father, and writing the reassuring letter that all young Alpine travellers have written?

Gibbon had prepared himself for the journey by reading the accounts of Hannibal's passage of the Alps; and it is to the classical scholars, rather than to the scientists, that we owe the next development of travel in this portion of the Alps. John Durant de Breval, in his *Remarks on Several Parts of Europe* (1728), had asserted that Hannibal must have crossed the Little St. Bernard to the Val d'Aosta. There is no evidence that Breval himself explored the route, though he crossed the Mont Cenis several times; but in 1775, General Melville¹⁵ set out to visit the main passes of the Alps, in the hope of settling the matter once and for all. He preferred the narrative of Polybius to that of Livy; and his interpretation of Polybius led him up the Isère valley, past Moûtiers and Bourg St. Maurice, to the foot of the Little St. Bernard,

¹² John Moore: *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany*, 1779.

¹³ They appeared in the *Journal Britannique* (The Hague, 1752), the *Hamburgisches Magazine* (1752), the *Journal Étranger* (Paris, 1755), and the *Journal Littéraire de Berne*. They were reprinted as a separate brochure at Berne (1760) and at Turin (n.d.), and finally they were included in Spallanzani's *Nouvelles Recherches sur les Découvertes Microscopiques* (London and Paris, 1769). The map reproduced opposite p. 56 is from the latter publication.

¹⁴ *Letters of Edward Gibbon*, ed. Prothero, 1896.

¹⁵ Lieut.-General Robert Melville, F.R.S. (1723–1809).

where he caught sight of the great mass of gypsum known locally as La Roche Blanche :

Au moment où le général Melville découvrit ce rocher, il tenoit devant lui, sur le cou de son mulet, l'histoire de Polybe en grec, il lisoit les mots qui signifient *près d'un certain rocher blanc*.¹⁶

Spurred on by his discovery of a convincing λευκόπετρον ὄχυρόν, Melville climbed the rough gully of the Reclus to the top of the pass, where he found an open space which would certainly have been big enough to enable Hannibal to encamp with his whole army. The double coincidence was striking, but not conclusive : would the descent reveal a passage corresponding to that which gave so much trouble to the Carthaginians and their elephants ?

Pendant que le général Melville étoit à l'hospice, il s'étoit informé du Moine résident, si l'on trouvoit dans la descente de la montagne, un endroit qui correspondit à la description de Polybe. Le Bernardin lui répondit : vous serez satisfait, vous verrez ce mauvais bout de chemin en descendant.

On the way down, near La Thuile, Melville crossed a high and narrow bridge over a small stream :

A few hundred yards beyond the junction of the brook with the river, is such a narrow path on the steep side of a loose and rocky hill, as is liable to be washed away by falling rains or melting snows, or even to be beaten down by balls of snow ; and as well corresponds, in the General's opinion, with the broken road that interrupted Hannibal's march. When the General passed it in September 1775, it had been repaired in some places by long pine trees, laid length-wise, and planed along their upper sides. Over these he, his servant, and his mules were obliged to pass ; and he was told by his mule-driver that this was the worst part of the Alps and that the inhabitants were forced to repair it every year.¹⁷

Melville was not, however, wholly satisfied until he had visited the other passes which had been put forward as the route of the Carthaginians ; and even then (though he no longer had any doubts) he did not print his observations, but merely communicated them, years afterwards, to de Luc, who inspected part of the terrain for himself and cordially endorsed the General's views, and to Whitaker, who stayed at home and opted for the Great St. Bernard.¹⁸

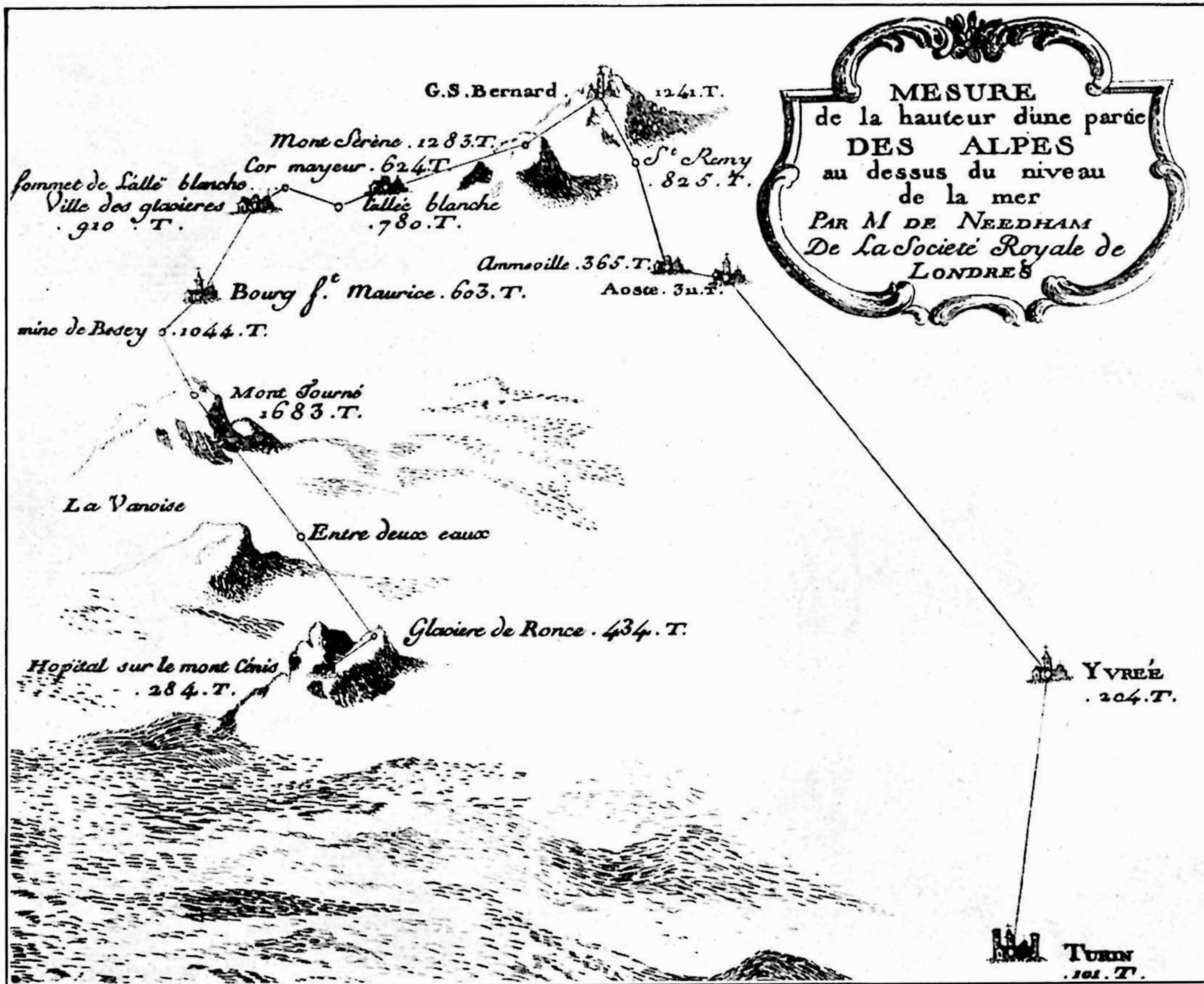
After Melville, the next English traveller to leave the beaten track was Thomas Sedgwick Whalley¹⁹ who spent several summers in the neighbourhood of Chambéry. In May 1784, together with two young Italian officers, the Count Vivaldi and the Chevalier Galateri, Whalley made a journey from Chambéry, past St. Pierre d'Albigny (' a paltry little town, in a delightful situation ') to Moûtiers. Leaving Moûtiers before sunrise, he paid a visit to the silver mines at Peisey, near Bourg

¹⁶ J. A. de Luc : *Histoire du Passage des Alpes par Annibal*, 1818.

¹⁷ John Whitaker : *The Course of Hannibal over the Alps Ascertained*, 1794.

¹⁸ A curious fatality of error has dogged all references to Melville's biography. A useful memoir can, however, be found in the *Annual Register*, 1809, p. 721.

¹⁹ The Rev. T. S. Whalley, D.D. (1746-1828). I am indebted to Lieut.-Col. G. R. de Beer for drawing my attention to this enterprising absentee rector of Hagworthingham, ' *le bel anglais*,' as Marie Antoinette called him.



St. Maurice. The scenery of the Isère valley he found enchanting, but the more strictly Alpine surroundings of Peisey were too severe to please him :

The mines of Pezay are in the bowels of the Alps, and shut out from the cheerful haunts of men, by a surrounding chain of the most bleak and barren of the mountains. Stupendous and frightful rocks, precipitous steeps russet with heath, wild and melancholy heights rough with short brushwood, or bleakly bare to the piercing blasts, intermixed with precipices glazed with perpetual ice, and towering mountains white with eternal snows, formed the striking features of the wildly desolate scene.²⁰

Whalley was aware that the mines had formerly been worked by an English company ; and in conversation with the director he learned that over 500 people were employed in them.

From his headquarters at Moûtiers (where he was the guest of the Commandant), Whalley made several other excursions into the foothills of the Tarentaise : ' With what ecstasy did I climb up the extremest heights, and plunge myself deep into the forests of pines that darkened their brows.' The Savoyards were surprised and amused at the spectacle of travellers in ' round white hats, and English leather breeches,' but they were kindly and hospitable. At the abbey of Tamié, which Whalley and the gay Galateri visited at the end of June, the travellers were warmly welcomed by the Prior. Galateri had to return to Moûtiers, but next day Whalley, escorted by the Prior's elderly servant, continued the journey :

I parted with my lively friend at Tamier, and whilst he trod his way back to Moutiers, pursued my wild way across the mountain solitudes to Bellevaux, a convent of Benedictines.

The monastery of Bellevaux is in the upper part of the Chéran valley. ' The position of the monastery is most picturesque,' says Ball ; and Whalley found the last stage of the day's journey was short but steep :

Half an hour's difficult climbing by one of the most impracticable of all the mountain roads, landed us safe at the convent's gate, and just as its bell sounded sweetly to dinner. . . .

Again, Whalley found himself welcomed most hospitably ; and the Prior, though he felt it necessary to pray for the heretic's conversion, nevertheless enjoyed his company and approved his tastes :

As the kind Prieur saw my real feelings of the imposing scenery, he proposed an excursion the next morning to the summit of a neighbouring Alp, which he told me was esteemed the highest in Savoy. Accordingly, he loaded a mule with wine and provisions. . . . About midway up, and after two hours' climbing, we arrived at some large fertile meadows. . . . In about two hours more we reached the desired spot, but not till after having plunged through a mass of snow almost up to our mules' bellies. . . .

It was at the latter end of June that Whalley made this expedition : what was the peak or col that he reached ? All we know is that the mountain-pink and gentianella were in flower near the summit, and

²⁰ T. S. Whalley, *Journals and Correspondence*. Edited by Hill Wickham, 1863. ' Journal the Second ; in the Tarentase.'

that St. Pierre d'Albigny and the Château de Miolan were visible in the valley below. The Passage de la Lanche (1950 m.) or La Lanche itself (2064 m.) or even the Pointe des Arces (2144 m.) seem possible answers. In any case, the altitude would not have equalled that attained by Needham among the far higher mountains further east ; but Needham was a scientist, and we can at least claim for Whalley that he had made ' the first purely sporting ascent ' by an Englishman in this region.

That night, the traveller was entertained at Bellevaux by moonlight music, and next day he reached the monastery of Allezon. Once again, he was received with great kindness and courtesy :

As I had journeyed thither on my good little Prieur's own mule, and attended by his own servant, both of which were gone back to Bellevaux, the Prieur of Allezon had his favourite beast caparisoned for me to return to Chamberry, and set me thereon.

The beast proved to be a *jumarre*, a creature with a bull's head and tail (but no horns) and a mule's body (' O my Lor, c'est une bête qui est faite entre un taureau de montagne et une jument '). This curious mount gave some trouble : ' I found myself in the middle of a river, and the gentle jumarre making repeated efforts to finish all my worldly cares by kicking out my brains.' Soaked but not discouraged, Whalley arrived at Chambéry, and survived to make further expeditions around the Lac de Bourget.

A few years later, Whalley published a poem on Mont Blanc,²¹ but his travels in Savoy, like those of Melville and Needham, long remained unknown to English readers. The habits of English travellers remained unchanged : the route over the Mont Cenis, with its well organised system of post houses and *marons*, was the only road they knew ; and even to a knowledgeable traveller like Alban Butler (1745), the valley of the Isère, with its rough road and its even rougher mule-track over the Little St. Bernard, had little to offer. The Mont Cenis had, of course, the great advantage that it could often be kept open when other routes were blocked by snow. ' I should have liked to pass through Switzerland, the Derbyshire of Europe,' says Mrs. Piozzi, but the season being far advanced she decided to travel by Lanslebourg. ' As for Mont Cenis, I never felt more hungry, or better enjoyed a good dinner, than I did upon its top.'²²

The route across the Mont Cenis was now becoming one of the main roads of Europe. Saussure says :

Lorsque j'y passai pour la première fois en 1772, on étoit obligé de démonter entièrement les voitures et de charger les brancards sur des mulets ; mais dans mon dernier voyage en 1787, les chemins étoient en si bon état, que l'on passoit tout le train, même des plus grandes voitures, dans les endroits où le chemin n'est pas trop rapide et à force de bras dans les autres.²³

²¹ *Mont Blanc: an irregular lyric poem*, 1788.

²² H. L. Piozzi : *Observations and Reflections made in the course of a Journey through France, Italy and Germany*, 1789.

²³ H. B. de Saussure : *Voyages dans les Alpes*, 1796.

When Dr. Rigby crossed the pass in August 1789, he found that the road 'though attended with some inconveniences, was perfectly safe.'²⁴

As the road itself improved, so a few travellers and savants ventured to leave it. In 1784, the Chevalier de Lamanon had ascended a point which he called 'La Fraise' above the plain of the Mont Cenis. Saussure, in 1787, thought 'La Fraise' child's play—'no snow, no ice, not a single *mauvais pas*'—and climbed the more interesting Roche Michel (3492 m.); he had a poor opinion of M. de Lamanon. Meanwhile, M. Martinel and the Chevalier de St. Réal had passed the summers of 1786 and 1787 on the plain. Dr. James Smith,²⁵ arriving from Turin on August 13, 1787, with Dr. Buonvicino, a mineralogist, the Abbé Vasco, a natural philosopher, and one or two other learned gentlemen, spent several days in the agreeable company of these distinguished savants. On August 14,

we all sallied forth about five of the morning to ascend Little Mount Cenis. . . . The grass was studded with the vivid blue of innumerable Gentians, mixed with the glowing Crowfoots, and the less ostentatious *Astrantia major* and *Saxifraga rotundiflora*, whose blossoms require a microscope to discover all their beauties, while the alpine rose (*Rosa alpina*) bloomed on the bushes, and, as a choice gratification for the more curious botanist, under its shadow, by the pebbly margin of the lake, *Carex capillaris* presented itself. . . . At length, about eleven o'clock, we reached a small plain full two-thirds of the way to the top. Here we divided. Some of our party were adventurous enough to climb the very summit; but being already got to the utmost limits of vegetation, and near those of perpetual snow, I had no business higher.²⁶

It is consoling to a countryman of James Smith to remember that Colonel Beaufoy had climbed Mont Blanc just a week before Dr. Smith abandoned the British altitude record for the Maurienne at 2500 m.; consoling, too, to read of the part played by Englishmen in the development of winter sports at Lanslebourg:

In winter, when they descend to Lannebourg, the guides have at the top a kind of sledge, in which they conduct passengers with inconceivable velocity to the bottom. These machines slide on iron keels down the icy sides of the mountain, and may be stopped or guided at will. So agreeable too is the swift passage, that many English gentlemen, as they informed us, have taken the trouble to reascend Mount Cenis for the purpose of sliding down a second time.²⁷

The *descente par la ramasse* in winter was one of the early attractions of Lanslebourg²⁸: some travellers say that it could be accomplished in seven minutes, others say ten. Mr. Ayscough, of the Guards, did

²⁴ Dr. Rigby's *Letters from France in 1789*, edited by Lady Eastlake, 1880.

²⁵ Sir James Edward Smith, M.D., F.R.S. (1759–1829), Founder of the Linnean Society.

²⁶ J. E. Smith: *A Sketch of a Tour on the Continent in the years 1786 and 1787*, 1793. For 'La Fraise,' see *Revue Alpine*, 1911, p. 247.

²⁷ Thomas Watkins: *Travels through Swisserland, Italy etc. in the years 1787, 1788, 1789, 1792*.

²⁸ The other was 'a very conversible mademoiselle' who had 'consoled many a traveller during his stay in these dreary regions'—or so said the Rev. Robert Gray, who visited Lanslebourg in September 1791. 'I have no where seen a little syren better calculated for detaining travellers, who are not violently pressed to cross the mountain,' observed the Rev. John Owen a month later.

it in six.²⁹ Richard Lassels mentions it in 1670 ('men are posted down the Hill upon the Snow in Sledges with great celerity and pleasure'); but when Arthur Young crossed the snow-covered pass on a sunny day in December 1789 he thought the thrill had been overestimated, though he was not too *blasé* to appreciate the 'laughable adventures' of a Savoyard girl whose mule became restive at the passage of the *traineau*. 'The girl's head pitched in the snow, and sank deep enough to fix her beauties in the position of a forked post; and the wicked muleteers, instead of assisting her, laughed too heartily to move.'³⁰

The subsequent developments of that type of humour belong to the history of St. Moritz and the Cresta Run rather than the history of Alpine travel, for within two years the first of our real pedestrian tourists had appeared. It was in 1791 that Joshua Lucock Wilkinson set out from Boulogne for Geneva and Chamonix: he had little money in his pocket; and his clothes were unsuited to Alpine travel; nevertheless at Les Contamines he and his travelling companion took a guide and struggled up to within an hour and a half of the top of the Col du Bonhomme, but were driven back by deep snow. Next day (July 16) they tried again, and found the snow rapidly disappearing in the hot sun. On the 14th, they had encountered heavy rain and floods on their way down the valley of Chamonix:

Two days afterwards we attempted to pass Bon Homme; and having arrived on the third day in the Lordship of Tarentaise, and arising at a very early hour the next morning, we threaded the narrow vallies, and happily traversed the terrible Mont Isère, after a severe march of fourteen hours. But this fatiguing day, the length of the walk, or the natural or reflected heat of the sun, had so exhausted me, that when we arrived at Bonneval, I was utterly unable to eat or drink. After those two mighty passes, Mont Cenis was an easy afternoon's walk. . . .³¹

Wilkinson gives few details of this interesting journey: his book is not arranged in chronological order, but is a series of highly discursive essays on the character and way of life of the people whom he met on his journey. At one moment we are in the Tarentaise where 'the poor inhabitants were hurrying along the narrow and confined gorges of the Isère to the church of Sainte Foi'; at the next, we may be back in Geneva, or visiting Avignon or Brieg or Chiavenna. But with Needham's journey from St. Rémy to the Mont Cenis, and Whalley's tour from monastery to monastery in the Bauges, Wilkinson's crossing of the Col du Bonhomme (2483 m.) and the Col de l'Iseran (2769 m.) marks the beginning of the British tradition of Alpine travel, as distinct from the climbing of specific peaks; and certainly, to the people of Savoy and Piedmont, the idea of an Englishman deliberately deciding to *walk* was astonishing: 'But why? *vos excellences!* why on foot?—The English, who go to Turin, travel in carriages, *diablement hautes*—and you on foot.'

²⁹ *Letters from an Officer, containing some account of France and Italy*, 1778.

³⁰ Arthur Young: *Travels during the years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, 1792.

³¹ J. L. Wilkinson: *The Wanderer, or anecdotes and incidents, the results and occurrences of a ramble on foot through France, etc., in 1791 and 1793*, 1798.

For the moment, Needham and Wilkinson found no adherents among their countrymen. No other English traveller ventured to explore the far recesses of the Graians, and soon the Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars made travel difficult. Already, in August 1789, had Dr. Rigby found at the inn at Chambéry, 'some of the French runaway Noblesse'; and in April 1794 there was some desperate fighting on the Little St. Bernard, when an ill-equipped French division drove the Austro-Sardinian forces down to La Thuile. Savoy itself came under French domination; and Napoleon attached such importance to the Mont Cenis that between 1803 and 1810 he spent seven million francs on the building of a first class road. (In 1810, the pass was traversed by 2911 carriages, 14,037 carts and waggons, and 37,255 horses and mules ³²).

(To be Continued)

THE NUSHIK LA

I. THE NUSHIK LA IN 1943

By R. C. F. SCHOMBERG

[This pass, which crosses the watershed to the S. of the Hispar Glacier in the Karakoram Himalaya, has been mentioned frequently in the records of Himalayan exploration; but so far as is known only three European expeditions have crossed it. The account of the most recent of these, by Colonel Schomberg in 1943, has an added interest by virtue of the fact that it indicates that considerable changes in snow and ice conditions have recently occurred. His article will therefore be followed by a brief account of earlier crossings of the pass.—EDITOR.]

IT may be of interest to have an account of this pass, which has been so seldom crossed by a European, and which was traversed in 1892, at the time of the expedition of the late Lord Conway. There is an account of the journey in his book, *Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram-Himalayas*.

The Nushik La lies almost due N. of Arandu in Baltistan, and is the only pass that gives access to the area drained by the Hunza river from that which is drained by the Shigar river and its very considerable series of tributaries. The Hispar valley with its formidable 'wall' can nowhere be crossed except at its head, over the pass of the same name, and lower down over the Nushik La. The Hispar Pass is practically

³² W. Brockedon: *Illustrations of the Passes of the Alps*, 1828-9.