

JOHN AULDJO, FORTUNATE TRAVELLER

BY J. MONROE THORINGTON

WHEN C. E. Mathews, during his Presidency, represented the Alpine Club at the International Congress in Geneva early in August, 1879, he called on 'a hale old gentleman with a white beard' who was then H.B.M. Consul and who had ascended Mont Blanc more than half a century before.¹ This was John Auldjo, born in Montreal on July 26, 1805, his forebears being Scotch although the name (Algeo) is of Italian origin.²

On coming to England at an early age, Auldjo was educated at Atwood's School, Hammersmith, and matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1823, although he never took his degree. In 1827 he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, but did not proceed to the bar.

During a tour of the Continent in 1827 he reached the summit of Mont Blanc and, in the following year, published a *Narrative* that far exceeded in interest the stories of his predecessors, this being in large part due to the inclusion of eight of his own graphic sketches, almost the first drawings of actual climbing by one who had experienced the events. His exploit brought him the gold medal of civil merit from the King of Prussia and a diamond ring in 1829 from the King of Sardinia, while his subsequent returns to Chamonix were met by cordial reception from the guides and other inhabitants. His book went through three editions³ and had important influence in the transition of mountaineering from a suspect scientific pursuit to an acknowledged sport.

On passing the Lac de Chêde on his way to Chamonix early in June, the reflected view of Mont Blanc aroused in Auldjo a determination to attempt the ascent. But even after excursions to the Jardin and Brévent he was unable to obtain guides, and so returned to Geneva, where in the following month he met his countrymen, Hawes and Fellows, on their

¹ *A.J.* 9, 33; *Annals of Mont Blanc*, 143.

² Peter Algeo came to England on a Papal mission to Edward I, and was in Scotland in 1290. For this and other facts relating to John Auldjo we are indebted to the biography by J. M. Bulloch, *Notes and Queries*, May 12, 1934. John Auldjo (1710-86), a baker of Portlethen, had five sons, the third of which, Alexander, went to Montreal and was the father of the subject of the present paper.

³ *Narrative of an Ascent to the Summit of Mont Blanc*; 4to, pp. ix, 120 (London, 1828). This was issued almost simultaneously with the privately printed and therefore less-known narrative of Fellows, which also contained arresting illustrations. Second edition; 8vo, pp. x, 148 (London, 1830). To this Auldjo added two new maps and several lengthy footnotes, one quoting the mountain scene in vol. I, chap. 2 of Scott's *Anne of Geierstein*. Third edition, 8vo, pp. xii, 119 (Traveller's Library; London, 1856). The principal addition to this edition was an annotated list of the ascents of Mont Blanc brought up through 1855. There was also an abridged account in *The Recreation: A Gift Book for Young Readers* (12mo; Edinburgh, 1842).

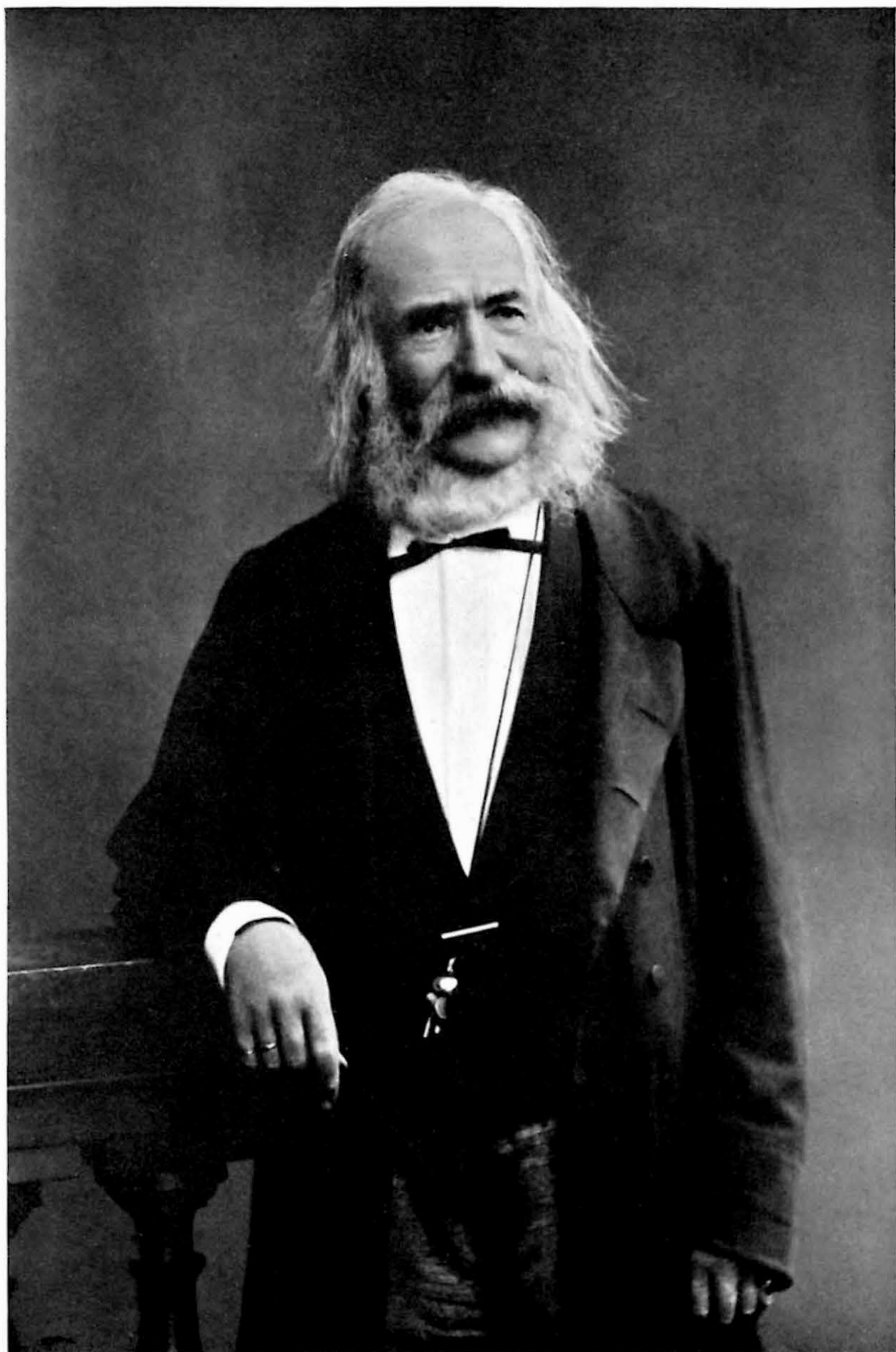


Photo by F. Boissonas, Geneva, ca. 1884.]

JOHN AULDJO.
(1805-86.)

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way home from establishing a new route by the Corridor, superseding the Ancien Passage which had proved fatal to Hamel's party in 1820.

Auldjo hastened back to Chamonix, securing the services of Joseph Marie Couttet and Julien Dévouassoud (both of whom had been with Dr. Hamel), and, with four other guides made the ascent on August 8-9. Their fine evening at the Grands Mulets was described in a memorable passage :

Now the violet tint was upon us, but the summit of the mountain was still burnished with a line of bright gold. It died away, leaving a bright lovely red, which, having lingered long, dwindled at last into the shade in which all the world around us was enveloped, and left the sky clear and deeply azure.

Dramatic incidents are entertainingly depicted, particularly in the drawings entitled ' Passage of a block of Ice in a Crevice,' and ' Bridge of Snow where the Party breakfasted.' The guides' technique of bringing an exhausted tourist up the final slopes is equally noteworthy :

Two of them went up in advance about 14 paces, and fixed themselves on the snow ; a long rope was fastened round my chest, and the other end to them ; as soon as they were seated, I commenced ascending, taking very long strides, and doing so with quickness, pulling the rope in ; they also, while I thus exerted myself, pulled me towards them ; so that I was partly drawn up, and partly ran up . . . I had taken very little notice of the progress we were thus making, when I suddenly found myself on the summit . . . It was exactly eleven o'clock.

Chance has preserved a letter⁴ which Auldjo, seated on the summit snow, wrote to his sister, perhaps the first message from such an altitude. Fatigue is still evident in the rambling hand and confusion of the date :

Summit of Mont Blanc [*sic*]
11 o'clock Thursday
9th August 1825 [*sic*]

My dear Annie :

It may give you some pleasure to know that I am looking down upon you at this moment. You can judge of the gratification I have in being above the habitable world—a thing I've much desired. I have just drank a bottle of wine to your health. My guides join me & we all wish you well while drinking—long life and happiness—& even this high I am not forgetful of the many times I have written & now write again that I am your

affectionate brother

John Auldjo

⁴ The original letter, written in pencil, was found by Mr. J. Sanseverino in a presentation copy of Auldjo's *Narrative* (1828) and presented by him to the Alpine Club. Although almost illegible in parts, its decipherment represents the best efforts of the editor and the present writer. It is signed on the back of the single sheet : Julien Devouassoud, Simond Jacques, Couttet, Joseph, Michele Favret, Jean Marie Couttet, Pierre Tairraz.



Watercolour by John Auldjo.

A DANGEROUS PART OF THE GLACIER.

On regaining the Derniers Rochers, while descending, they found the bottle deposited by Clark and Sherwill in 1825, but it was filled with water and the message intended for posterity destroyed. They saw the débris of a huge avalanche that had fallen during the morning on the Ancien Passage and would have overwhelmed them had they not been on the new Corridor route. They reached Chamonix that evening after an absence of thirty-seven hours.

For many years after this adventure Auldjo lived in Naples, becoming acquainted with interesting residents and visitors, among them Sir William Gell, the classical archaeologist, and Sir Walter Scott, to whom Auldjo acted as cicerone. An urge for exploration led Auldjo to examine Vesuvius in detail, his first visit being in 1831. His notable book, *Sketches of Vesuvius*, appeared in London in 1833,⁵ many of the illustrations by the author 'being sketched by perspectograph,' the text covering the principal eruptions from the commencement of the Christian era. His interleaved and grangerised copy is now in the British Museum. This investigation brought him admittance to the Royal Society in 1840, and he was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, 1832-57.

In 1833 Auldjo voyaged to the Greek Islands and Constantinople, recording his experience in a *Journal of a visit to Constantinople* (London, 1835), seven of the author's sketches being etched by George Cruikshank.

Auldjo had known Bulwer Lytton at Trinity, their friendship being renewed when the latter visited Naples in 1833. It is evident that Lytton made use of Auldjo's work on Vesuvius when writing *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The 1836 edition of Lytton's *Devereux* is dedicated to Auldjo. The vase of dark blue glass with white cameo reliefs, which Auldjo secured from Pompeii, is now in the British Museum.

The winter of 1841-2 was spent in Spain, Auldjo journeying from Cadiz to Seville and visiting Malaga and Grenada. But Spain disappointed him and he returned to London in the spring, his residence being Noel House, Kensington Road, almost next to Holland House. He was present at Albert Smith's party at Rule's in January, 1854, when Dr. Hamel, François Favret and John MacGregor were among the guests.⁶ Two years later, still in the city, he wrote a new preface for the third edition of his Mont Blanc story.

In 1856 a financial crisis compelled Auldjo to leave England and settle in Calais. He married Caroline H. Hammet at Paris in 1860 and went to Geneva to spend the summer, remaining instead for two years. The Auldjos lived at Florence during 1862-5, returning to Geneva in July of the latter year and making it thereafter their permanent home. Their two daughters were born there. As late as 1869 Auldjo took part in a journalistic discussion as to whether Edmund Kean had ascended Mont Blanc.⁷

Auldjo was British Consul at Geneva from 1870 until the end of his

⁵ A second edition was published at Naples in 1852.

⁶ *Mont Blanc Sideshow*, 182.

⁷ *A. J.* 47, 118.

life, 'a quiet and reserved little old gentleman who was very popular among the then small English colony. He was to be seen on most market days walking round carrying a basket, sometimes accompanied by an elderly female retainer, and making purchases for his table.' Fréd. Boissonas, the Genevese photographer, made a portrait of him about 1884. He died in his apartment, 7 Rue des Alpes, after a short illness, on May 6, 1886, and was buried in the Chatelaine cemetery, a tablet surmounted by his arms being subsequently erected to his memory above Pew 51 in Holy Trinity Church, on the Rue du Mont Blanc. His death occurred just a few months too late for him to be included in the original edition of the *D.N.B.* As a dilettante of means, he had never required gainful occupation; even in his position of consul he was unpaid.

As his books reveal, Auldjo was a skilled artist, and the drawings reproduced in his account of Mont Blanc were the inspiration of Albert Smith's earliest efforts at showmanship.⁸ It is remarkable how this influence continued. Smith ascended Vesuvius and visited Constantinople in 1849, extension of the journey to Egypt leading to his first important public venture, *The Overland Mail*. Smith again followed his hero's example in 1851 by ascending Mont Blanc, and the two nearly anticipated the founding of the Alpine Club.⁹ It is uncertain when they first met, but their mutual regard was long-standing, and had Auldjo remained in England he would undoubtedly have joined the Club with the same qualification as Smith. When Albert celebrated the ascents of Mont Blanc in *Bentley's Magazine* for 1841, he devoted an entire stanza to his friend:

Woodley, Clissold, and Beaufoy, each thought it no lark,
And were followed by Undrell, and Sherwill, and Clark,
Then Fellows and Hawes by a new passage went,
And avoided the dangers of Hamel's ascent
With their batons so sharp, tra la !

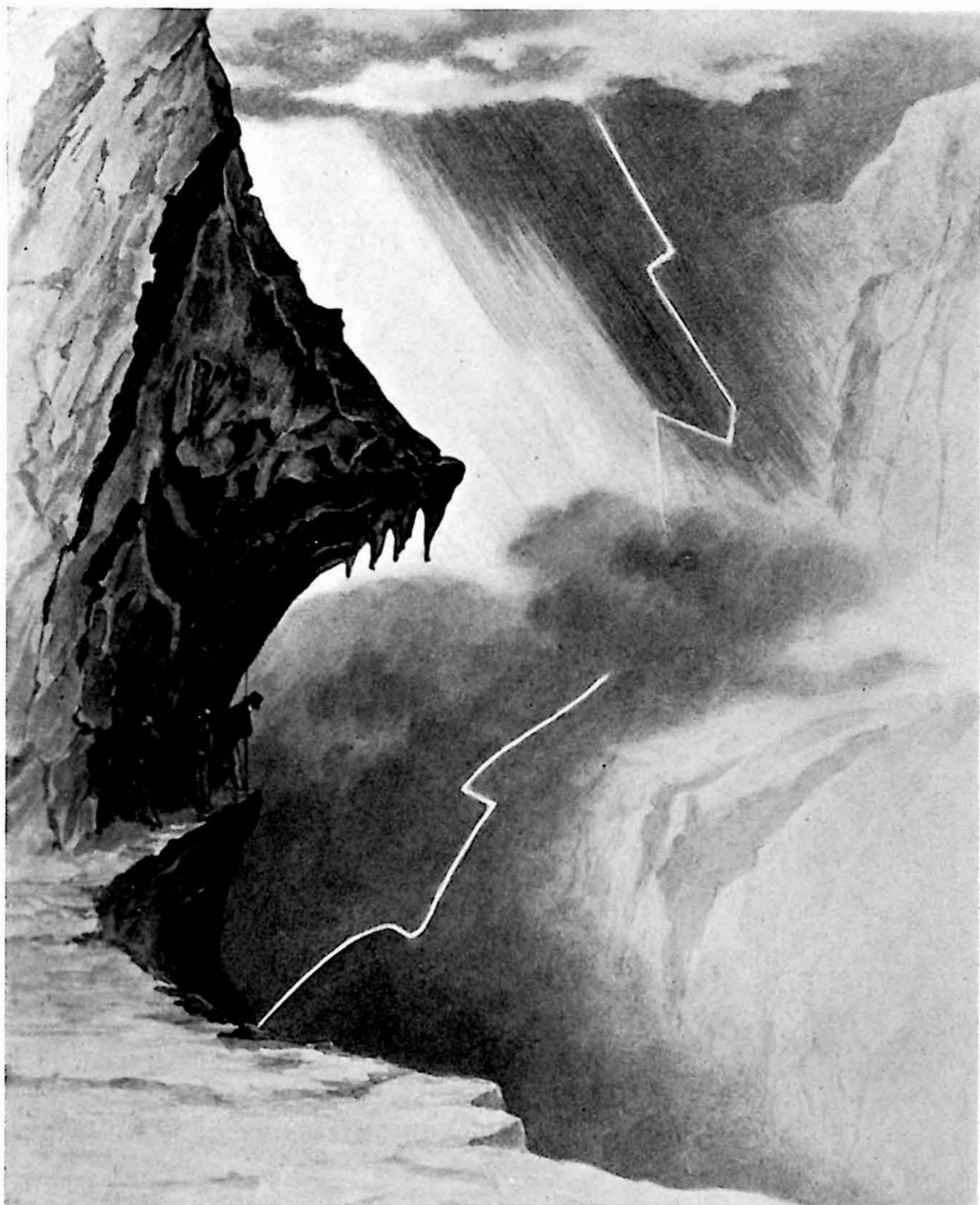
Brave Auldjo next was pulled over a bridge
Of ice-poles laid on the glacier's ridge ;
You will see all his wonderful feats if you look
At the views, drawn by Harding, and placed in his book,
And his baton so sharp, tra la !

Full forty gentlemen wealthy and bold,
Have climbed up in spite of labour and cold ;
But of that number there lives not one,
Who speaks of the journey as very good fun.
With their batons so sharp, tra la !

Even after 1827 Auldjo continued to make drawings of his ascent of Mont Blanc. The present writer has seven of these, six being sepia

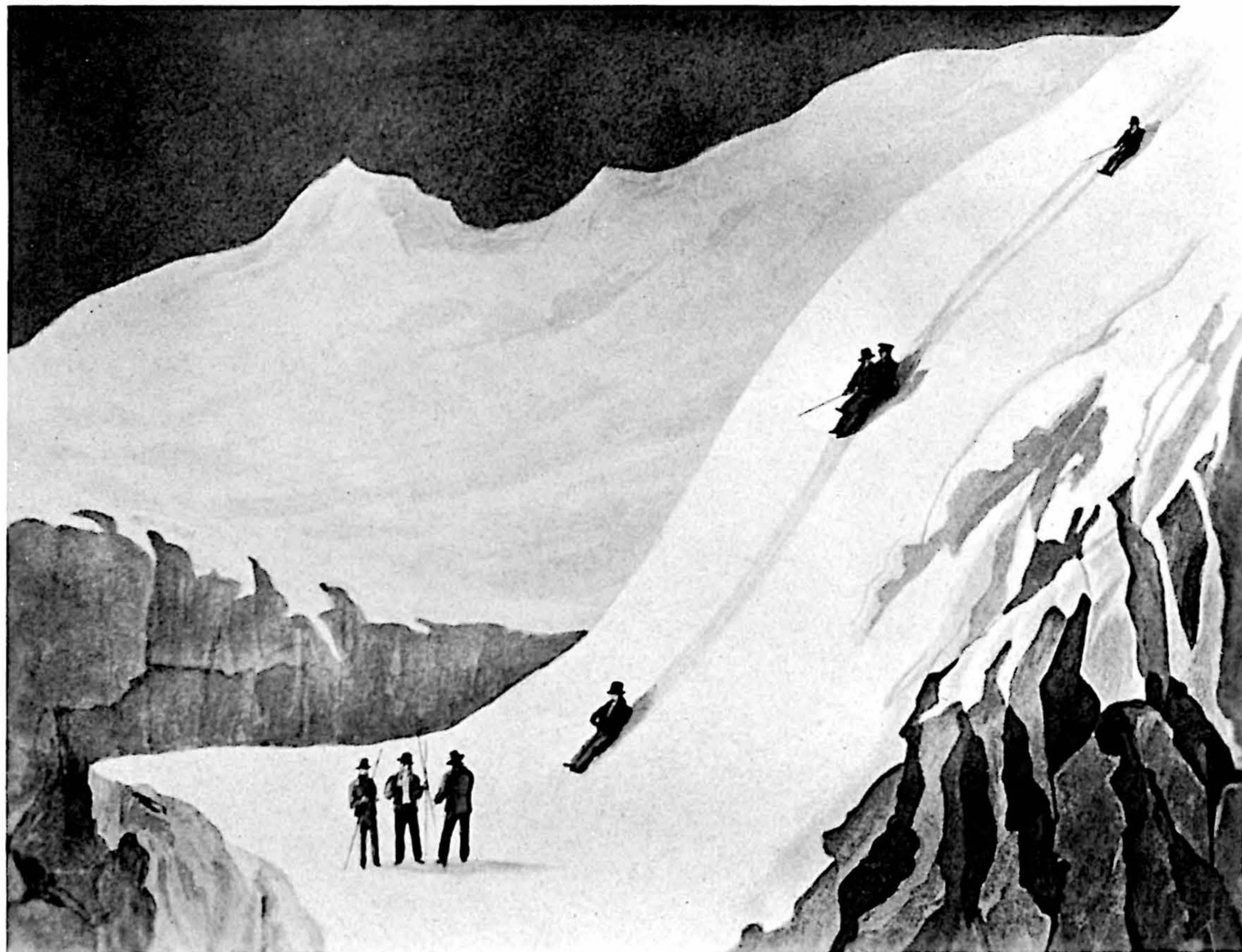
⁸ *Mont Blanc Sideshow*, 6, 37.

⁹ *A. J.* 58, 3 ; *Mont Blanc Sideshow*, 111, 115, 123.



Watercolour by John Auldjo.]

SHELTER DURING THE STORM.



Watercolour by John Auldjo.]

SLIDING DOWN A SNOW HILL.



Unpublished watercolour by John Auldjo.]

ASCENT OF MONT BLANC.

copies of the climbing pictures of the first edition. Minor changes have been made in the position and number of the figures, although this is only evident on close inspection. All have carefully lettered titles. The sepia view of 'The Grands Mulets' has the date Nov. 6, 1834, placed on the snow at the foot of the rocks. The seventh picture is an elaborate watercolour showing seven climbers (Auldjo and his six guides) with alpenstocks working their way through crevasses, quite different from any published view. It bears the date November 3, 1835. Three additional watercolours of the same series were in the collection of the late Count de Suzannet. Although unsigned and undated, these correspond with the published plates entitled: 'A Dangerous Part of the Glacier,' 'Sliding down a Snow Hill,' and 'Shelter during the Storm.' The second of these lacks the two background figures on the lower plateau, which were added to the lithograph.

Auldjo's ascent of Mont Blanc took place just 125 years ago. It was an important event in mountaineering history, and it is fitting that it should have been the last recorded in Dr. Paccard's diary.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

If we except magazine articles, Clissold's slim pamphlet, *Narrative of an Ascent to the Summit of Mont Blanc*, which appeared in 1823, was the first account of an ascent of Mont Blanc to be published (in the technical sense of the word) by a British climber who had been up the mountain. But it probably had a very small sale, and Auldjo's *Narrative* (1828), the second account similarly to be published, achieved a popularity which had an important effect in preparing the ground for the subsequent establishment of the sport of mountain climbing. Its more immediate importance in popularising the ascent of Mont Blanc itself was recognised before the birth of the sport, and in his preface to *Ten Scenes in the Last Ascent of Mont Blanc* (1853), J. D. H. Browne described Auldjo's book as 'a work . . . which first made Mont Blanc popular.' Albert Smith's *Story of Mont Blanc* was published a few months later in 1853, and it helped to cause a marked increase in the popularity of the ascent.

As Dr. Monroe Thorington points out in his footnote on p. 459, Auldjo's book achieved several editions, and a fourth edition may be added to his list. This, which was published as late as 1867—forty years after Auldjo's ascent—was a simple reprint of the third edition, which had appeared in 1856 as No. 100 of the *Traveller's Library* (Longmans). But Auldjo's influence had not been confined to the actual editions of his book. At the time of first publication, his *Narrative* was noticed by the literary reviews in articles which were sometimes devoted to it and contained page-long extracts from the book (see, for example, the *Edinburgh Review*, October 1829); and abridged accounts of the ascent or long extracts from the *Narrative* subsequently appeared in magazines, in annuals, and in books. Examples of these may be mentioned

here : *The Excitement*, vol. 3, 1832 ; *The Saturday Magazine*, Nos. 347 and 351, 1837 ; *The Recreation*, vol. 2, 1842 ; and *The Alps* by the Rev. Charles Williams in 1853 (as a separate part) and 1854 (as the book). Further, mere references to Auldjo's ascent, or brief quotations from his *Narrative*, even in such unlikely gift-books as *Rural Pickings*, 1846, and *The Christian Wreath* (circa 1852-5), indicate that Auldjo's influence persisted into the years which immediately preceded the birth of the sport.

T. GRAHAM BROWN.