THE MATTERHORN CENTENARY

By B. R. GOODFELLOW

(*Five illustrations: nos. 50–54*)

Edward Whymper must have appreciated in his lifetime that his ascent of the Matterhorn and his own dramatic account of the disaster had added immeasurably to the glamour of that incomparable mountain. So he must have realised the great contribution which he made personally to the greater prosperity of the people of Zermatt; they have long acknowledged this and the centenary was closely linked with Whymper's name.

But he could scarcely have foreseen the impact of to-day's mass affluence, of the rise of ski-ing and of universal publicity on the Alpine village he had known first over 100 years ago.

We had all expected for some years that the centenary of the Matterhorn ascent would be used by Zermatt for publicity on the grand scale. With the true mountain lovers' distaste for the prostitution of the Alps for commercial ends, many decided to keep away in 1965. But by doing so they missed a great occasion. For, although the Festival Week was unashamedly dedicated to Zermatt propaganda, the whole of the functions were conducted in the very best of taste. Above all Zermatt, for this week, was the meeting place for mountaineers from all over Europe and from America, India and further afield. Enjoying the warm and generous hospitality of our Swiss hosts, we made many valuable new friendships and renewed old ones.

The Alpine Club came in some strength, more than fifty in number, many with their wives and some with their families. It is true that most were from our not so young or less active membership; others no doubt preferred to be elsewhere for their climbing or to come out later in this very stormy season. It was a delight to see so many of our members from Switzerland, Italy, America and Holland. We started with a Club dinner on Sunday night, July 11, immediately before the Swiss official week of celebrations. In keeping with tradition the dinner was naturally held in the Monte Rosa Hotel, and the Club's thanks are due to Herr Bernard Seiler and especially to Fraülein Eberhardt, who worked wonders to squeeze in more than 120. In addition to some eighty members of the Club and their guests we invited, amongst the official guests, the descendants and other relatives of the 1865 party, notably Mrs. Ethel Blandy, Whymper's daughter, and Colonel Charles Hudson, grandson and namesake of the Rev. C. Hudson. Places were also allotted

to M. Egmond d'Arcis, President of the Centre Alpin, and to the A.B.M. S.A.C. In the opinion of most the dinner ranked as almost equal of that held, also at the Monte Rosa, in the summer of 1957 to mark the Alpine Club centenary. The pleasure of the occasion was much enhanced by the President's success in preventing all save himself from after-dinner speaking.

Then the Swiss celebrations began in earnest. Zermatt was dressed in the brightest of flags, and show-cases in the main street provided an open air exhibition. The band constantly delighted us, and the guides paraded in their immaculate uniforms. The Zermatt museum, housed in a new building, and much enlarged in scope and in interest, was formally opened with oratory and drinks outside. Sir John Hunt delivered an official message from the British Government. On Tuesday all who had not gone climbing were taken by train to the Gornergrat, where from the station they were led to the summit plateau by a fife and drum band in top hats. A press conference followed at the Riffelberg, and a large raclette lunch, unfortunately indoors.

On the centenary day itself, July 14, a large congregation attended a memorial Mass in the open air with the Matterhorn in the background behind the altar. The Bishop of Sion preached, and at the end of the service the Bishop of Leicester gave a memorable address in English. After the Mass there was a procession to the cemetery where wreaths were laid not only in memory of those who fell in 1865 but of all who have fallen in the mountains. In the square before the Taugwalder Haus, Sir Arnold Lunn spoke notably on the traditional partnership of British alpinists and Swiss guides. In the evening a crowded congregation, by no means exclusively British, attended a most moving service in the English church, with an address, in memory of the Rev. Charles Hudson, by the Bishop of Leicester. Earlier in the day there had been a full programme of outdoor celebrations, which included speeches by the Mayor of Zermatt (Dr. J. Aufdenblatten) and a member of the Bundesrat, and performances of an alpine march and Matterhorn symphony, specially composed. There was folk music and dancing, and films were shown every evening.

It was noted with regret that only a few were able to come from France. The choice of the same week for the official opening of the Mont Blanc tunnel displeased the Swiss, and the Italians were embarrassed at having to leave early. However, it was good to see Gaston Rébuffat and Jean Franco, who managed to be at Zermatt as well as Chamonix by prodigious driving.

Meanwhile the Matterhorn was restricted to all others while a great army prepared for live television of the ascent on the centenary day. Those in Zermatt during the previous week could observe, with some amazement, that a couple of helicopters were fully occupied ferrying



Photo: F. Solari]

MATTERHORN CENTENARY: CELEBRATIONS AT THE RIFFELBERG, JULY 13.

(No. 50)

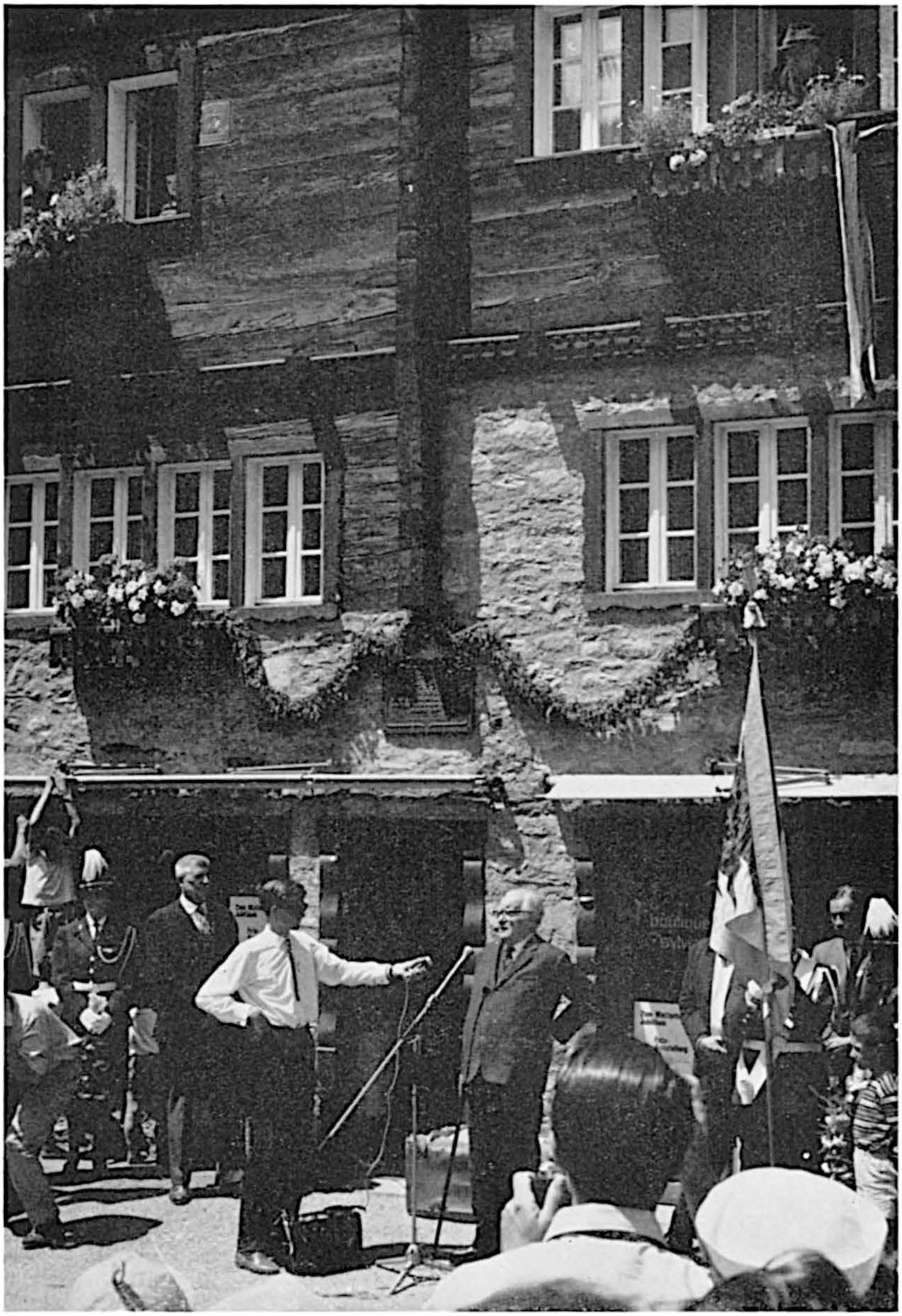
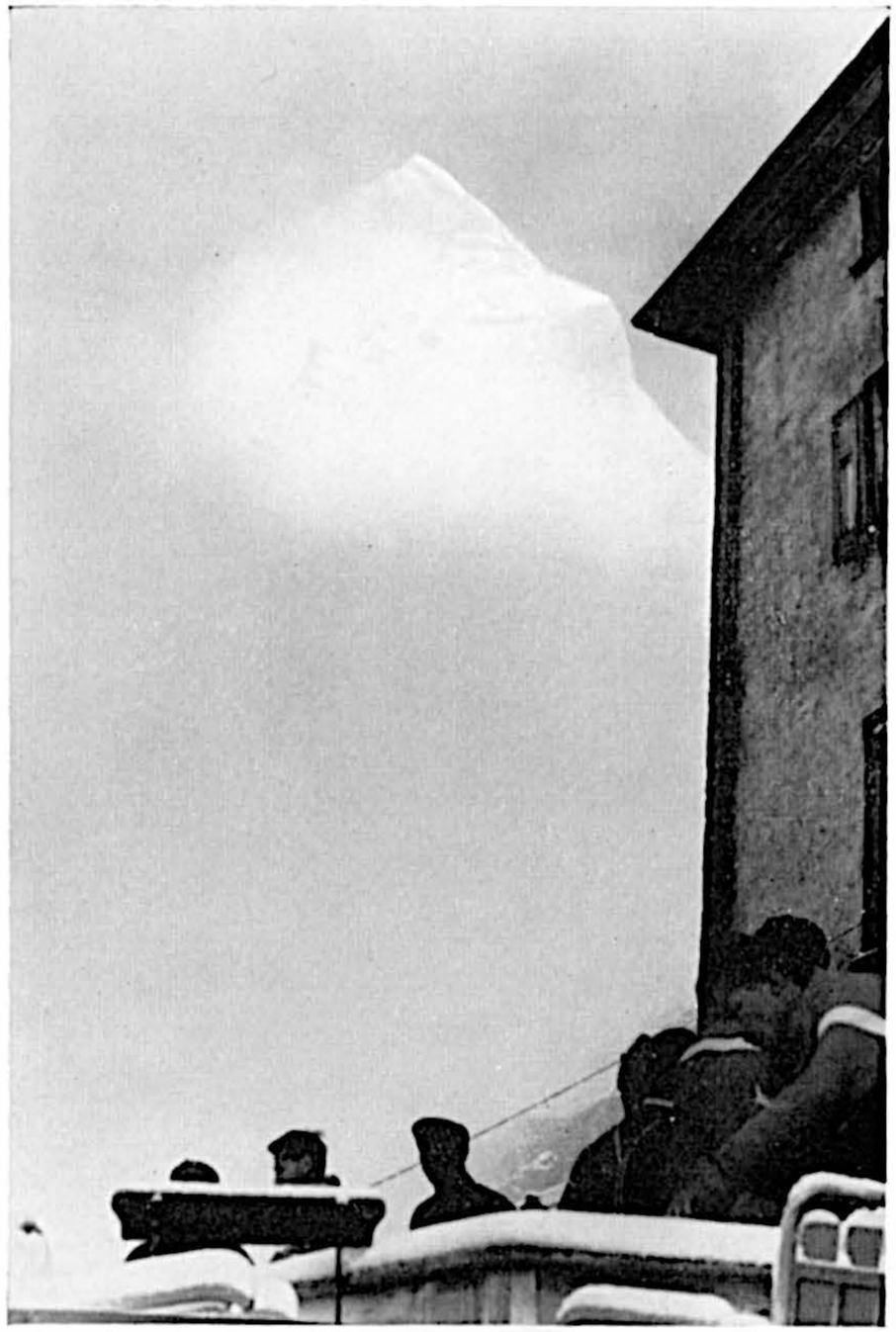
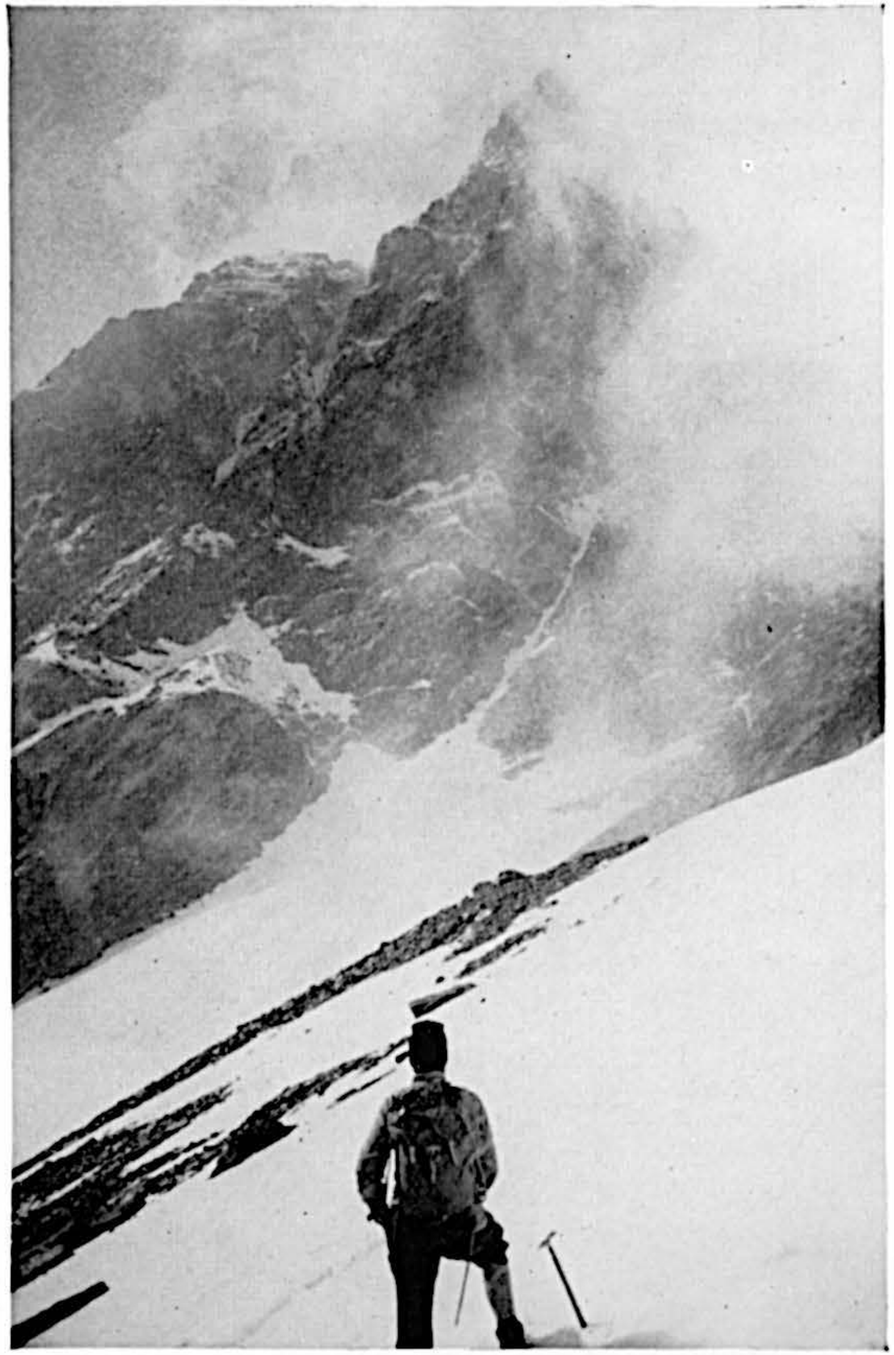


Photo: F. Solari]

SIR ARNOLD LUNN SPEAKING OUTSIDE THE TAUGWALDER HAUS, JULY 14.

(No. 51)





Photos: B. R. Goodfellow]

TWO GLIMPSES OF THE MATTERHORN ON THE DAY OF THE INTENDED ASCENT OF 'DISTINGUISHED GUESTS' (JULY 16). *Left:* FROM THE BELVEDERE AT 6 A.M. *Right*: FROM THE ITALIAN SIDE OF THE FURGGJOCH A FEW HOURS LATER.

(Nos. 52, 53)



Photo: F. Solari

BREUIL-CERVINIA ON JULY 17, WHEN THE NEW GUIDES' CENTRE WAS OPENED.

large loads from the halt above the Riffelalp up to the Belvedere on the Hörnli whenever the weather allowed, and that most of the Zermatt guides and many others were engaged in carrying loads of electronic gear onward up to strategic points on the mountain. This was a considerable achievement in the conditions of heavy snow on the mountain after the storms of July 4. However, these activities did not prevent others from getting onto the Matterhorn. At least two ascents were made, one by Alfred Bush of the American Alpine Club and another by G. F. Goodchild of the A.B.M.S.A.C. A solo ascent on the centenary day is also reported elsewhere in this number.

Eurovision and the B.B.C. can consider themselves very fortunate to have had on July 14 one of the rare fine days for the centenary. But whether this vast expenditure of effort and money was justified by the quality of the T.V. show is a matter on which many opinions were expressed. Certainly most of those who saw the performance, which could be seen on every T.V. set in Zermatt from time to time during the day, considered it to be a remarkable technical achievement but an utterly inadequate representation of mountain climbing. By contrast, the magnificent colour films which we were able to see, and especially Mario Fantin's beautiful film 'La via italiana al Cervino' seen later in Breuil, were not only free from the 'personality cult', but gave the audience a vivid impression of being actually upon the mountain and of sharing the climbers' enjoyment of the magnificent situations.

The real stars of the centenary day were, of course, M. Michel Vaucher and Yvette, his wife, the latter making the first ascent by a lady of the North face in conditions far from ideal. They were seen by the T.V. millions while on the way down from the summit, accepting glasses of sherry proffered with a remark which sounded like 'Dr. Livingstone, I presume'. It was most appropriate to the occasion that the guide leading the T.V. party was Hermann Taugwalder, a grandson of 'young Peter'. His work on the Matterhorn had unfortunately prevented him from attending the Club dinner.

During the week some modest climbing was being done by those who were not committed to the festivities or who felt their absence would not be noticed if they cut them. Conditions on the mountains were deplorable. The pattern of alpine weather which most of us have now come to accept as normal had set in. Heavy snowfall in the late spring made the upper glaciers a misery. Storms recurred every three or four days and between them the one or two brilliant days were insufficient to clear any but the few south-facing rock ridges. Even the Rothorn had only been climbed with much difficulty by an A.C. party which missed the dinner in consequence, and such peaks as the Weisshorn were out of the question. We had to be content with lesser things—Allalinhorn, Alphubel, Strahlhorn and Rimpfischhorn, on which one

party included the President of the Alpine Club, the President of the Ladies Alpine Club and the 'ancient president' (*sic* in Swiss translation) of the American Alpine Club.

Parties failed, in impossibly deep snow, on Breithorn North face and on Dent d'Hérens West face. It was a walkers' week, with the compensation of superlative flowers, such as one might expect in May or early June, of views of outstanding brilliance, and of the incomparable purity of the snows.

Friday, July 16, was the day chosen for the 'distinguished guests' to ascend the Matterhorn if they wished. A small Italian group was to come up by their ridge, and a service was to be held on the summit when the parties met. All were to descend into Italy. The less ambitious were offered alternatives, to cross by téléférique and sno-cat over the Théodule, or to go round and over the Great St. Bernard by bus.

When we walked up for two hours from the Schwarzsee téléférique to the Hörnli, in doubtful weather, a memorable scene greeted us at the Belvedere. With no hut to share the load (the old Hörnli was dismantled and the new one not yet built), the hotel was packed to bursting point. All the Zermatt guides seemed to be there, and reinforcements had been called from the Val Tournanche. Half the crowd seemed to be pressmen, festooned with cameras and even attempting tape recordings in the pandemonium. Yet by superhuman effort the kitchen wined and dined us all. To add to the confusion, the mule, just arrived with essential provisions, was brought into the hall out of the increasing snowfall; it was observed trying to follow two distinguished members of the Ladies Alpine Club upstairs. Our man from the Treasury, after observing the weather, remarked that there was 'a very reasonable probability that it might be a fine morning'. To be fair to him, Felix Julen, the chief guide, and others, concurred.

At 4.0 a.m. there were four inches of snow on the tables on the Belvedere terrace. Julen decreed that all should descend to the Schwarzsee and go to Breuil over the Théodule. Two hours later an infinite column could be seen far away through the mist filing up the snowfields; it only needed the appropriate background of Tchaikovsky to complete the illusion of the 1812 retreat from Moscow. The President of the Alpine Club led the column stripped to the waist, having removed his shirt to protect it from the intermittent snow. At the Théodule the Italians welcomed the marchers with hot wine and much good cheer.

But the column did not include John Hunt, who is not the man to retreat. The Matterhorn had to be assaulted before defeat could be conceded. With Albert Eggler, whose expression revealed his thoughts about the traditional lunacy of the British, Hunt's party set forth, followed by only one other party of father and son. After two hours of moving in sloppy snow, and achieving less than half guide-book speed,

all admitted that honour was satisfied. We returned, watching the avalanches streaming off the faces. We went our ways to Breuil, some going on foot over the Furggjoch into dramatically stormy weather.

We all felt a sense of bitter injustice that the Matterhorn had saved its one rare fine day for television and not for the climbers. For this was the one occasion when the route we normally prefer to avoid would have been fun to climb.

Whymper might indeed be surprised to see Zermatt today, although for all its growth and modernisation it still manages to retain much of its character. Not so Breuil; Whymper would not recognise the place at all, for in fact Breuil no longer exists. In its place the Italians have built Cervinia, a ski resort in easy reach for the fortunate Milanese, as modern in architecture and amenities as the industrial cities which it serves.

The Italian celebrations were wholly different from the Swiss, for they were celebrating not only J.-A. Carrel's ascent three days after Whymper's, but in particular they were honouring the Guides of Valtournanche on the centenary of the foundation of the Societa Guide del Cervino. For this occasion Dr. Guido Monzino, their Honorary President, had endowed a Guides' Centre, a splendid new building of modern design in the main street of Cervinia. In this an exhibition of equipment was staged, and in the large cinema below the formal meetings of the day were conducted, the speeches being relayed outside for those who preferred to sit in the sun.

We were greeted with fireworks, a most spectacular display, against the background of the floodlit Matterhorn, which mounted to such a climax that all were lost in their own smoke.

The ceremonies, which lasted only for the following day, beginning at Valtournanche then moving to Cervinia, were dedicated wholly to honouring the Valtournanche guides by recounting their many achievements; the many 'firsts' on new routes and winter ascents on the Matterhorn, and their notable expeditions in all parts of the world from J.-A. Carrel's exploration of the Andes with Whymper in 1879–80 until the present day.

Again we had music, from the band of the feathered *bersaglieri* of an Alpine regiment. The guides, similarly hatted, were even more splendid in uniform than the Swiss.

It was intended that there should be a mass climb of 'Alpine Divisions' (*sic*) up the Matterhorn both by the Italian ridge and by a smaller military party by the Furggen ridge, and it was said that the routes had been heavily reinforced with extra ropes to make this possible in any conditions.

A large Alpine Club contingent had crossed over to Italy to participate in the Italian functions, and we were all grateful for the warmth of our

welcome and for the generosity of our hosts' hospitality. Especially we felt honoured that on this of all occasions so many of our Italian members should wear the A.C. tie.

Indeed, our all too brief visit to Cervinia enhanced the love we have for the open-hearted friendliness of our Italian friends and for the beauty of their country.