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DR. PACCARD'S DIARY.

By E. H. STEVENS.

NO more important and interesting document has come down to us from the era in which modern mountaineering began than the MS. diary of Dr. M. G. Paccard of Chamonix, who with Jacques Balmat made the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786. The late C. E. Mathews obtained the diary from Dr. Paccard's great-grandson, Ambroise-Adolphe Balmat. He made some use of it in his 'Annals of Mont Blanc,' and bequeathed it to the Alpine Club. It is now carefully preserved in a special morocco case as one of the chief treasures of the Club library. A transcript of the text was made by (or for) the late H. F. Montagnier—*quem honoris causa nomino*—and from this a nearly complete reprint was published, with the consent of the Committee of the Alpine Club, as an appendix to Dr. Dübi's 'Paccard wider Balmat' (1913). This is the only form in which the whole text of the diary is accessible, and unfortunately Dr. Dübi's book is long since out of print.¹ Some extracts, however (relating to the ascents between 1787 and 1825), were printed in Mr. Montagnier's valuable article

¹ It would be a boon to many students if a reprint of the diary (and perhaps of a few other rare documents of the period) could be published at a moderate price. It might indeed be suggested that this boon is one which the Alpine Club, as the custodian of the original, owes to the mountaineering world.

on the Bibliography of the Early Ascents of Mont Blanc ('A.J.' 25, 608-40), and other lengthy quotations, describing the chief attempts of 1783-6, will be found in the notes to Gaillard and Montagnier's 'Le Mont-Blanc et le Col du Géant.' Finally, all those portions of the diary which are relevant to the story of the first ascent and the preceding attempts are embodied (in English) in an article² in which an endeavour was made to reconstruct from all available sources the full narrative of his ascent which Dr. Paccard undoubtedly intended to publish, and which, had he done so, would have been read, as de Saussure said, from one end of Europe to the other, but which it is now generally agreed never reached the press.

The question naturally arises, is the MS. of the diary in Dr. Paccard's own handwriting, or is it a copy by someone else? In attempting to answer this question it is necessary to repeat the description of some of the chief features of the little book given in my previous article. The diary is written in a 12mo volume, bound in what is now somewhat shabby vellum, and containing 180 pp. of rather rough, soft paper. The MS. occupies 73 pp. of the book. Of the remainder about 75 pp. are blank, and scattered among these (on some 30 pp. in all) are disjointed jottings of domestic accounts, and of the family history (1825-1855) of Jean-Michel Balmat, who had married Dr. Paccard's granddaughter (the daughter of his son Ambroise). The diary gives accounts, often in considerable detail, of the later ascents of Mont Blanc down to those of Jackson (1823),³ and Clark and Sherwill (1825).⁴ There are

² *A.J.* 41, 98-156 ; 42, 165-184. The substance of these articles, translated into French by Mlle. C. E. Engel, has appeared in *Alpinisme* (1933, 'trimestres' 1, 2, 3), and in this version the matter derived from Dr. Paccard and from other contemporary sources is reproduced as far as possible in the original wording.

³ The diary states the date and times of Jackson's ascent, and refers for fuller details to the account which Dr. Paccard sent to the *Journal de Savoie* (Oct. 3, 1823). It was in this account that he reiterated his claim to have discovered the route from the 'grand plan' (sc. Grand Plateau), and in view of avalanche dangers suggested the corridor as a safer alternative (*A.J.* 41, 124).

⁴ Of this ascent the diary contains (a) Paccard's private account; (b) his copy of a different, less interesting account, which he sent to the *Journal de Savoie*, dated August 31, 1825; (c) his copy of the subedited version of this which appeared on September 16; (d) copy of an account sent to the same Journal by Jacques Balmat, dated August 31 and published on September 30!

also, however, brief notes of the ascents by Fellows and Hawes in July 1827 and by J. Auldjo in August 1827. These (and also the short note on Rodatz, 1812, derived from 'Cachat le Géant') are written in a decidedly different, bolder and larger hand. As Dr. Paccard died in May 1827, this change of handwriting would strongly suggest that the earlier entries (*i.e.* the great bulk of the MS.) were written by Paccard himself. It is clear from the differing aspect of the pages that they were written at different times, with different pens and ink, but careful comparison makes it almost certain that they are the work of one and the same person.⁵ The early entries are strangely out of order. On p. 1 (numbered 3 in the MS.) is the central portion of my § 3; p. 2 is full of botanical notes; pp. 3-12 (all numbered 1) contain § 4; pp. 12-17 (all numbered 2) contain § 5; on the rest of p. 17 are §§ 1, 2; on p. 18 are the beginning and end of § 3, with a reference for the middle portion to p. 1. After this the passages follow in chronological order. These facts suggest a copy, perhaps begun hastily to preserve fugitive jottings, but continued more systematically. Such a copy might, of course, have been made by Paccard himself, writing up his notes from time to time. (They extend over 50 years altogether.) A serious difficulty, however, arises from the fact that, while the punctuation and arrangement of the MS. are somewhat careless,⁶ the only really serious blemish is the frequent mis-spelling—often to the point of illegibility—of the botanical names. As Dr. Paccard's chief scientific interest was in botany,⁷ it is hard to believe that he could have made such a mess of his botanical notes, which,

⁵ In *Dübi*, p. 268, it is stated, probably on the authority of Mr. Montagnier, that with (Dübi's) section XI (which is p. 48 of the MS., containing the notes of the first three ascents) a fresh hand begins. I therefore examined this with special care, with the help of Mr. Sydney Spencer, who agrees with me that these sections, and the pages which follow them, *are* all by the same hand as the previous pages. See the facsimile of this page given herewith.

⁶ But not more careless, nor has the MS. more deviations from ordinary spellings and grammatical forms, than the almost contemporary Pyrenean notebooks of Ramond de Carbonnières, who nevertheless was a man of far higher standing in the literary, social and official worlds than the village doctor could claim to be. See the verbatim extracts in *A.J.* 44, 157, 158.

⁷ As de Saussure said, he was 'un joli garçon, plein d'intelligence, aimant la botanique, créateur d'un jardin de plantes alpines' (Freshfield's *Life of de Saussure*, French ed., p. 180).

on the other hand, would have been precisely where a copyist unfamiliar with the subject might well have come to grief.

So far then the balance would seem to incline—as Dübi considered, and I then agreed—towards the belief that the MS. was a copy, perhaps by the doctor's son Ambroise,⁸ of the original memoranda. Until recently no document in Paccard's handwriting was known, comparison with which might serve to decide the question. In August 1932, however, in almost dramatic connection with the inauguration of the memorial to Dr. Paccard at Chamonix, the existence of a long letter written by him while he was at the University of Turin became known. Through the kind offices of Signor Commendatore Bobba, the Civic Library of Turin permitted the facsimile reproduction in *La Montagne* (January 1933) of the three pages of this letter. We are deeply indebted to M. Pierre Dalloz, the editor of *La Montagne*, for his kind permission to reprint them here. The letter is written with extraordinary care and neatness, and is so easily legible that there is no need to reprint its text. The careful and precise observations recorded in the letter confirm Dr. Paccard's reputation as a keen student of science and an accurate and clear-headed observer. The letter was written when he was not quite twenty-two.

For comparison we give four pages of facsimiles from the diary, chosen as containing matter of special interest or importance. The first is p. 9, which reads as follows in Dübi's reprint.⁹ '[C'est] plus facile par la vallée du fond ou près de Cormayeur par le même passage qui paroît au delà de la Noire, où on dit que l'hôte Abondance de Cormayeur est venu à la poursuite d'un bouquetin et d'où il dit avoir vu toute la vallée du Bayer. Nous avons compté trois éguilles de granit derrière l'éguille percée, lesquelles on ne voit pas depuis Chamonix; toutes les autres sont aussi doublées ainsi plusieurs fois; on voit une infinité de ces éguilles de granit et c'est le lieu où l'on peut étudier ces sortes de roches. Nous avons couché derrière l'éguille du Midi où nous [avons vu neuf chamois, etc.]'

This extract contains the intriguing reference to the 'Aiguille

⁸ For the ability and scientific interests of Ambroise Paccard, and for his keenness in supporting his father's claims to the chief honours of the first ascent of Mont Blanc, see *A.J.* 42, 167, 168.

⁹ The substance of the extract, with explanatory comments, will be found in *A.J.* 41, 112, 113 (see also *A.J.* 42, 172-8). Comparison of the reprint with the facsimile will show how the original has been slightly corrected and punctuated by Dübi to make his reprint more convenient to read.

percée' and the 'three granite aiguilles behind it which are invisible from Chamonix.' In a previous discussion of the subject,¹⁰ a suggestion made by M. Morin was adopted, viz. that the Aiguille percée was one of the great gendarmes on the N.E. ridge of the Requin.¹¹ The three granite aiguilles behind it would then be the Requin, the Grand Gendarme d'Envers du Plan, and the Pain de Sucre, which are actually *the only three important summits of the whole group of aiguilles that are invisible from Chamonix* or its neighbourhood. But my friend Professor Graham Brown, who was kind enough, at my request, carefully to inspect the gendarmes in question, reports that they show no visible or conspicuous hole which would account for the name 'percée.' Moreover, the way in which the name is used by Paccard in this passage certainly suggests that it was an established, or at any rate a familiar name, not merely a descriptive epithet invented to identify a minor pinnacle.

Fresh light on the problem comes from a passage which has been strangely overlooked both by myself and, as far as I know, by others. In his 'Nouvelle Description des Glacières . . .', vol. iii. p. 60, Bourrit describes the group of Aiguilles as seen from Chamonix. 'A la suite de ces trois sommets,¹² qui composent ensemble le mont Blanc, commence une chaîne de rochers pyramidaux, aussi inaccessibles, de formes hardies, majestueuses, qu'on divise en pointes ou aiguilles. La première se nomme *l'Aiguille percée* ou du *midi*, parce qu'en effet on y voit le ciel au travers d'un trou.'

¹³

¹⁰ *A.J.* 42, 174-6.

¹¹ M. Morin referred to the Capucin du Requin (sometimes called the Vase de Sèvres), 3047 m., climbed by four guides on August 4, 1927 (*A.J.* 40, 163). But there seems to have been some confusion with the next lower gendarme, 2851 m., climbed by Mlle. Brunaud on July 17, 1928 (*La Montagne*, 1930, p. 45; *A.J.* 44, 330).

¹² *Viz.* the Dôme du Goûter, Mont Blanc, and Mont Maudit.

¹³ The passage continues: 'Celle qui suit, s'appelle le *Plan de l'Aiguille*; la troisième le *Blétierre*; la quatrième les *Charmos*; la cinquième la *Fourchue* & la sixième le *Dru*.' It is well known that the Grépon was not distinguished by a separate name from the Charmoz till soon after Mummery's first ascent in 1881. As to the Fourchue (= forked) I suggest that this is probably the Aiguille de l'M, which appears much more obviously a continuation of the chain of Aiguilles when looked at (as in Bourrit's description) from the valley than when it sinks into comparative insignificance as seen from a loftier view-point such as the Brévent. This is brought out more clearly in Bourrit's large plate in de Saussure's *Voyages*, tome II, p. 88, than in the smaller version of the same subject in his own book (*loc. cit.* p. 37).

Here we have strong contemporary evidence that 'Aiguille percée' was an alternative name in use at Chamonix for the Aiguille du Midi. Bourrit is a reliable witness on such a point, for he knew Chamonix well, visited it and stayed in it long and often from 1766 onwards, was intimately acquainted with the chief guides, and loved to describe in picturesque guide-book style what he had learned in his numerous excursions about the valley and its mountains. Later in the same volume he describes at length an expedition along the bases of the Aiguilles from the Plan de l'Aiguille to the Montenvers. When he wrote (in 1784) the sentences quoted above, he and Paccard had been in friendly relations for some years,¹⁴ and they had recently (Sept. 1783) made together a serious attempt on Mont Blanc *via* the Montagne de la Côte. There is, therefore, every probability that they would use, or at least be familiar with, the same nomenclature for the chief peaks.

In the section of his diary under discussion, Paccard is describing his descent (with Pierre Balmat of les Barats, in June 1784) from the Tacul basin near the Aiguille Noire (above the 'séracs du Géant'). 'Behind the Aiguille percée we counted three granite aiguilles which are not seen from Chamonix; all the others are also thus doubled several times; a vast number of these granite aiguilles are visible, and this is the place in which to study the rocks of this kind. We rested' [or, very unlikely, 'we spent the night'¹⁵] 'behind the Aiguille du Midi, where we saw nine chamois.' He goes on to relate that the chamois got down unnoticed, crossed the glacier [du Géant] and went up the Glacier de Talèfre, where the climbers watched them above and beyond the Pierre à Béranger. He implies that they followed the chamois, for

¹⁴ Bourrit's friendship with Paccard, and his enthusiasm for Chamonix are alike illustrated in his praise of the waters of the Arve (*loc. cit.* p. 292). 'These waters purify the blood, and can be used in venereal diseases with some success. Even at Geneva they have produced favourable effects in apparently incurable cases; at Chamouni their results are more speedy and certain; and this remedy has been employed with success by Doctor Paccard, who resides there.' Paccard was twenty-seven at this time. We may recall Michel Carrier's description of him, as 'savant médecin et naturaliste non moins distingué.' The friendly relations between himself and Bourrit were broken (two or three years later) only through Bourrit's jealousy of Paccard's success in achieving the first ascent of Mont Blanc, and his malicious attempt to assign all the credit to Balmat.

¹⁵ See a full discussion of this in *A.J.* 41, 113, and 42, 177.

in the next sentence he says, 'On the moraine below the Pierre à Béranger we found' certain plants. Now Paccard consistently uses 'behind' in the sense of 'behind as seen, or thought of, from Chamonix.' He refers, *e.g.*, to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur (seen from the upper Glacier du Géant) as the mountain 'behind Mont-blanc.' In the same way Bourrit speaks of the Mer de Glace as 'behind the Aiguilles,'¹⁶ and, more significant still, in the key-list of the localities shown by numbers on Exchaquet's remarkable relief-model¹⁷ of Mont Blanc, we find marked as the 'snow plain *behind the aiguille du midi*'¹⁸ that snowy basin, now called the Vallée Blanche, which stretches up above the Rognon and the Petit Rognon towards the Aiguille du Midi. It is suggested therefore that on his descent, whether to find an easier way down through the séracs (like Forbes in 1842), or, as his words rather imply, to examine the granite rocks of the Aiguilles more closely, Paccard crossed over to the left side of the Glacier du Géant and rested there, perhaps at the Petit Rognon. Here he could not fail to be struck by the great ridge of the Aiguille du Plan, and would note and count the three striking peaks (Requin, Grand Gendarme d'Envers du Plan, Pain de Sucre) along this ridge which are invisible from Chamonix, and which he might quite naturally describe as being, like his resting-place, 'behind, or at the back of, the Aiguille percée or Aiguille du Midi.' He had clearly noticed also how frequently the summits of this remarkable group tend to duplicate themselves, the various ridges bearing pairs or triplets of peaks of similar form and character but varying altitude. From the same spot he could watch the chamois as they mounted by the Pierre à Béranger. Indeed, his statement that these chamois '*got down, crossed the glacier (sc. du Géant), and went up to the Glacier de Talèfre,*' and that he 'saw them above and beyond the Pierre à Béranger mounting the upper snow slopes of the Talèfre basin,'¹⁹ seems

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.* p. 61.

¹⁷ Executed about 1786-7.

¹⁸ See E. Fontaine, *Notes sur l'Alpinisme* (1930), pp. 63 (fine photograph of Exchaquet's relief), 69 (key-list).

¹⁹ Probably making for what Bourrit (*loc. cit.* p. 106) calls 'l'extrémité du Talèfre: c'est un pâturage de chamois.' I would draw attention again to the light shed on this problem by J. D. Forbes' experiences in this region (in 1842, *Travels*, chap. xii). Leaving the Col du Géant at 8 A.M. he spent much time trying the descent of the Géant icefall on both sides. The party, led by J. M. Couttet, finally escaped *by following chamois tracks as a guide through the séracs on the side of the Petit Rognon, and got down on to the level glacier at 1 P.M.*

to fix his place of observation pretty definitely as the neighbourhood of the Petit Rognon. If we remember that the entries in the diary are after all only memoranda, we need not be surprised that even within a few lines Paccard should use the two names *Aiguille percée* and *Aiguille du Midi* as equivalents, without inserting an explanation which, in the notes for his own use, would have been superfluous, but which we may suppose he would have given if these notes had been written up into a formal and complete narrative. It may perhaps be objected that Bourrit's explanation of the name *Aiguille percée* has no foundation in fact. But even if it is true that he put forward a baseless explanation, his attempt to account for the name is at least good evidence for the prevalence of the name itself.²⁰

The second facsimile is p. 41 of the MS., reproduced by Dübi as follows :²¹ ' [Ils sont] descendus près de midi ; on les a vu passer à quatre heures sur une pente neigée du piédestal où sont des pointes de rochers qui percent la neige, site de la hauteur du Buet, derrière et au-dessus du glacier de la Griaz. Mr. de Saussure s'est fait attacher comme un prisonnier pour redescendre. Il étoit ceint par-dessous les bras par une corde attachée derrière à Pierre Balmat et à François Folliguet ; Couttet étoit devant, mesurant ses pas par les siens. Jean Michel Tournier tenoit Mr. Bourrit par le collet à la nuque et il s'appuyoit sur l'épaule de Gervais. Dans les mauvais pas à traverser on faisoit des garde-fous avec un bâton sur lequel Mr. de Saussure s'appuyoit, en montant et en descendant. Mr. Bourrit le fils, presque malade, se tenoit à l'habit de Cuidet en montant. Ils ont mangé du pain, bu de l'eau et du vin étranger. En descendant ils sont arrivés à la cabane à 6 heures.'

The third facsimile is p. 44.²² ' Le 7 Juin 1786 Joseph Carrier, Jean-Michel Tournier, François Paccard sont allés coucher à la Montagne de la Côte sous une balme assez bien où Joseph Balmat des Baux les a joint. Ils sont partis de grand matin pour aller au Mont-Blanc. Le même jour Pierre Balmat et Marie Couttet ont couché à Pierre Ronde au-dessus de

²⁰ That such names may easily pass out of use is paralleled by his '*Aiguille fourchue*' (see note 13), and by his name for the Lac du Plan de l'Aiguille, which he says is called '*le lac Dentan*,' because M. Dentan first discovered it (*loc. cit.* p. 146).

²¹ See *A.J.* 41, 121.

²² See *A.J.* 41, 122, 123, where it is suggested that the blunder in *Joseph Balmat* may be due to a careless repetition of *Joseph Carrier*.



By courtesy of 'La Montagne.' Photo, Tairraz.]

DR. M. G. PACCARD. FROM AN OIL-PAINTING BY AN UNKNOWN ARTIST IN THE POSSESSION OF M. J. P. PACCARD, HUSBAND OF DR. PACCARD'S GRANDDAUGHTER, ROSINE.

[To face p. 9.

Bionnassay et sont partis aussi le 8 pour aller au Mont-Blanc du côté de Bionnassay. Il y a encore beaucoup de neige sur le Brevent et à la Montagne de la Côte, mais elle porte le matin. Ceux qui sont allés par la Montagne de la Côte sont arrivés les premiers au pied de la dernière sommité du Mont-Blanc dans la plaine et ont pénétré jusqu'au rocher qu'on y [voit, etc.]. At the bottom of this page is the signature (from p. 67 of the diary) appended to the copy of the letter Paccard wrote to the 'Journal de Savoie' about the ascent of Clark and Sherwill (1825), *i.e.* (b) of note 4 (p. 2).

The fourth facsimile is p. 48 of the diary. It is given that readers may judge whether a new hand begins here, as stated in Dübi. Dübi's text is subjoined, with corrections in [] where the MS. has been misread or altered in matters other than spelling or punctuation.

'1. Notre voyage du 8 Août 1786.

'Arrivés à 6 heures 23 min. soir—repartis à 6 h. 57 m. Ils sont [y ont] restés 34 min.

'2. Celui de Cachat, Tournier et Jaques Balmat au Mont-blanc le 5 juillet 1787.

'3. Celui de Mr. de Saussure, avec 19 guides, [partit] le 1^{er} Aoust 1787. Il a couché au sommet de la Montagne de la Côte, le 2 [sc. il a couché] au plan du sommet du lac [glac. sc. glacier] des Bossons où il est arrivé à 6 heures. Arrivé aux blocs des Petits Rochers le lendemain [landemain] à 9 h. 7 minutes. Arrivé au sommet à 10 heures 50 minutes, descendu '

The passage continues: 'à 2 heures, d'autres à 3— . Le thermomètre étoit à trois degrés sous 0, le baromètre (Bourrit disant) à 10 [16] pouces 1 ligne. Peu d'électricité. Il est demeuré 4 heures et $\frac{1}{2}$ au sommet.'

Readers have now the opportunity of comparing the undoubted handwriting of Dr. Paccard (at the age of 22) with that of the diary. They will probably agree that the MS. of the diary, although written, naturally enough, with much less care than the youthful letter, is in Paccard's own handwriting. If this conclusion is accepted, it is needless to emphasize the gain in interest and authority which accrues to the diary, though it must be admitted that the botanical blunders remain as a puzzling problem.

It may be worth while to refer briefly to the handwriting of another document connected with the early history of Mont Blanc, viz. the MS. purporting to give Jacques Balmat's own account of his explorations in 1786, together with a list of the

ascents from that year down to 1830.²³ This MS. was discovered by M. Gex between the leaves of a family scrap-book that had belonged to Jacques Balmat,²⁴ and it was printed—with a facsimile of the first nine lines—in the *Annuaire* of the C.A.F. (1902, pp. 552 *et seq.*). The text is reproduced in Dübi (pp. 179, 180), who calls the MS. the 'autogram.' There was little doubt of the authenticity of the MS. as originating from Jacques Balmat, but it remained uncertain whether he had actually written it. Now we have two surviving documents which are undoubtedly in Balmat's handwriting. To rebut Bourrit's malicious insinuations, Dr. Paccard obtained from Balmat in the spring of 1787 a receipt for moneys he had given him in connection with their ascent of Mont Blanc.²⁵ He sent this receipt to von Gersdorf, amongst whose papers in the Görlitz library it was found 125 years later. A facsimile is given in Dübi, p. 81. In 'A.J.' 32, 248, there is a facsimile of a business letter written by Balmat in his later years, which was discovered and presented to the A.C. by Mr. Montagnier. A comparison of these facsimiles clearly shows the identity of the handwriting in the two documents, though the letter was written 42 years later than the receipt. Finally, on comparing the facsimile of the 'autogram' with the other two, it becomes manifest beyond doubt that all three are in the same handwriting, and consequently the 'autogram' is in every sense Balmat's work.

I should like to take this opportunity to repair an omission in my previous papers. I have only recently become aware that in 1922 a seventh edition of Durier's 'Mont Blanc' was published, enriched with valuable notes by MM. Charles and Joseph Vallot. On pp. 112–116 of this edition there is an impartial discussion of the Paccard-Balmat controversy by M. Joseph Vallot. (The note is unsigned, but we have M. Charles Vallot's authority for ascribing it to his uncle.)

²³ See *A.J.* 21, 408, and *A.J.* 41, 99.

²⁴ Amongst other papers found in the same way were 'consultations de médecins, dont une du docteur Paccard'! This is almost as ironical as the fact that when (in 1810) Dr. Paccard applied to the Municipal Council of Chamonix for the arrears of his salary as *Juge de Paix*, Jacques Balmat was one of the councillors who signed the resolution to take no action in the matter (*A.J.* 41, 145).

²⁵ The receipt runs as follows: 'Je soussigné certifie avoir reçu de Monsieur le docteur Paccard un écu neuf de la part de Mr. le Baron de Gersdorf le dix aout 1786 en même tems que mon gage. Jacque Balmat a Chamonix le 25 mars 1787.'

I should have been glad in my original article to quote M. Joseph Vallot's weighty judgments, had I known of them, especially as being a French counterblast to that tendency to exalt Balmat at Paccard's expense which until recently has been so pronounced amongst French mountaineers generally. I translate M. Joseph Vallot's chief conclusions. Since these are annotations on Durier's work they carry all the more weight as being so completely opposed to Durier's own views. 'The initiative in attempting the ascent belongs to Paccard as much as to Balmat. Paccard was the head of the expedition, and Balmat was his porter (porteur).' 'All the evidence proves that the two companions reached the top together, and the pitiable rôle ascribed to Paccard is imaginary.' With regard to the certificate and the suggestion that Paccard got Balmat's signature by a base trick, M. Vallot says 'all this is improbable.' 'Balmat, though unable to disown his signature, continued to give himself out, underhand ('en sous-main'), as the only discoverer of the route, and, backed up by his family, he made bold to spread this story. It is thus that he alone has come down to posterity.' The only point in which, in my opinion, M. Vallot still relies too much on Dumas's story is this. 'It appears certain that [in June 1786] Balmat did not go beyond the Grand Plateau, but that he saw with certainty the route to be followed.' On the contrary the evidence seems to me to prove that it was Paccard who devised the route from the Grand Plateau that proved the key to the ascent, that Balmat accepted this 'valley' route,²⁶ *which he had never tried*, as preferable to a renewed attempt by the 'ridge' route,²⁶ *on which he had failed hopelessly*, and that after the ascent Balmat invented the story of his explorations when deserted by his companions and of his (asserted) discovery of the route in order to gain credit with Bourrit and de Saussure. Bourrit then gave the story such publicity that Paccard had to obtain from Balmat the certificate which exploded this concoction. In later years, however, especially after the death of Paccard, the 'legend' was revived and elaborated by Balmat in various forms, until finally crystallized in Dumas's sparkling story, and completed, as far as the discovery of the route is concerned, in the more sober narrative of Carrier. It will be seen that M. Vallot, even if he allows to Balmat more credit than he deserves, gives full honour to Dr. Paccard, and does not mince

²⁶ See de Saussure, *Voyages*, IV, § 1965 ; *A.J.* 19, 343, 344 ; 41, 123, 125, 126, 151.

his words in explaining how Balmat gradually filched that honour from him. We may take it that this moderate and impartial verdict is now generally accepted in France, as shown by the part played by the Club Alpin Français in erecting the monument to Dr. Paccard which was inaugurated at Chamonix in August 1932,²⁷ and which does justice—welcome though long delayed—to the memory and the merits of one of the greatest pioneers of mountaineering.

Postscript.

M. Paul Chevalier, who alike as climber and photographer possesses an unsurpassed knowledge of the district, has had the great kindness to send me an exhaustive analysis and interpretation of Paccard's narrative of his Tacul trip. I am glad to find that he agrees (a) with the explanation I gave in 'A.J.' 42, 173, of 'the valleys which go [from the upper Tacul basin] in the direction of Courmayeur,' and the possible approach to Mont Blanc behind the Petit Capucin; (b) with the rendering of *nous avons couché* as 'we rested'; (c) with the identification now offered of Paccard's 'Aiguille percée' as being the Aiguille du Midi. But he considers that Paccard did not get further from his bivouac than the *base* of the séracs du Géant, and that his resting-place 'behind the Aiguille du Midi' was on the N. slopes of the Aiguille du Tacul, which he remembers hearing such experienced guides as Joseph Ravanel and Ed. Payot call the 'Aiguille *du Midi* du Tacul,' doubtless because it lies practically due south as seen from the Montenvers. He points out that a line drawn (on a *modern* map) from Chamonix through the Aiguille du Midi (Paccard's Aiguille percée) passes far from the Plan-Requin ridge and runs through the buttresses of Mont Blanc du Tacul, and consequently he looks for 'the three granite aiguilles *behind* the Aiguille percée, which are invisible from Chamonix,' and 'the other aiguilles also thus doubled' among such striking pinnacles as the Capucin, the Petit Capucin and the Aiguilles du Diable. He stresses the view that, Paccard's main purpose in this trip being to explore the possibilities of access to Mont Blanc on this side, his memoranda must be understood as written with his eyes fixed on Mont Blanc rather than on the Chamonix Aiguilles. These are only the main points of his ingenious and closely argued suggestions. To me it seems unsafe to suppose that Paccard, familiar with the names Aiguille percée and

²⁷ See *A.J.* 44, 340.

FACSIMILES OF DR. PAGGARD'S LETTER,
AND OF PAGES FROM HIS DIARY.

[*To face p. 12.*]

plus facile par la Vallée des
fonds ou près de Cormajeur par
le ^{même} passage qui paroit au delà
delà Noire ou on dit que l'hôte
^{abondance} de Cormajeur est venu à la ^{montre} pour
d'un bouchin et doit il dit avoir
vu toute la Vallée de Beyer.

Nous avons compté trois équilles
de granite derrière l'équille percée
^{les quelles} qu'on ne voit pas depuis —
Chamonix toutes les autres sont
aussi doublées ainsi plusieurs fois
on voit une infinité de ces équilles
de granite et c'est le lieu où l'on
peut étudier ces sortes de roches
nous avons couché derrière
l'équille du midi ou nous

Mon reverend père.

à Turin le 4 janv. 1779



J'ose prendre la liberté de vous écrire à l'occasion des —
promesses intéressantes que vous m'avez faites le premier août à
Chamonix (aux glaciers de Savoie) il est vrai que je ne meritois
point vos attentions, et que le peu de choses que vous prite dans
ma Collection commenceante étant indigne de vos recherches n'auroit
pu déterminer à me rendre le reciproque qu'une personne comme
vous qui vous y engageate même avec toute la politesse et
la bienveillance possible. Si j'ai manqué de moyens pour vous
satisfaire je ne crois pas avoir manqué de bon cœur et d'en —
menquer à votre égard; et comme je vais de jours en jours —
amplifiant ma Collection j'espère aussi que ce sera un surcroit
de moyens envers une personne qui fait une étude particulière
de la nature; mes desirs ne seroyent pas moindres que les vôtres
mais les difficultés qu'a un jeune-homme dont le jugement n'est pas
encore formé, dont les connoissances sont petites, et qui sans maître
doit tout faire par lui et le moyens des livres arretent mes progrès
et font souvent échouer mes entreprises. je ne laisse pas pourtant
que de continuer ma Collection; c'est un travail qui exige moins de
savoir et dont l'utilité se mesure par l'avantage futur.

J'ai fait plusieurs voyages depuis votre heureuse visite de façon
 que ma Collection se trouve au moins le double plus copieuse que quand
 vous l'avez vu; j'ai ~~été~~ monté sur le Buet Montagne la plus
 élevée, entre les accessibles des environs; j'ai vu les lits d'ardoise qui
 composent presque toute cette chaîne de montagnes sur lesquelles
 domine le Buet; les ardoises sont tantôt en feulletis, tantôt chitzeuses,
 c'est à dire en morceaux irréguliers joints à du quartz diversement
 troué, strié, souvent coloré en roux; on y trouve aussi du quartz
 grainu, comme du graiz; les quartz ainsi que les ardoises se rencontrent
 quelquefois unis à des cristaux; on trouve un autre quartz entre
 les eaux (route du Buet) très dur ayant toute l'apparence du marbre,
 de couleur bleue de ciel qui fait grand feu avec l'acier; j'ai observé
 plusieurs fours de cristaux sur cette montagne auprès des quels
 on trouve des pyrites qui paroissent *ferrugineuses arsenicales* composées
 de petites lames noirâtres différemment posées les unes à l'égard des
 autres, j'en ai même trouvé dans des cristaux qui y serboient des
 arborisations. Et j'ai visité le rocher tombant de dessous l'Inferlet
 le phénomène est dû à des pyrites qui se décomposent: j'ai trouvé
 de la chaux noire traversée de veines *spathzeuses* que vous prie, ayant
 le spathz cristallisé en pierre de fusil (tels sont les cristaux du
 foulli que vous prie): j'ai observé dans la carrière de cette chaux
 des endroits où elle étoit remplie de points dorés apparemment pyriteux
 car les environs presentoyent des trous remplis de bel ochre rouge,
 marque ordinaire des pyrites *efflorées*. Et j'ai pris en Valdost un
 spathz noir composé de stries fines qui sont concentriques d'un côté
 et divergentes de l'autre, tels sont les figures qu'on voit souvent
 sur les vitres des fenêtres en hiver. Et depuis que je suis à Turin

J'ai revu les banc de coquilles pétrifiées en jaspé agaté
Comme vous en avez vu dans ma collection on les trouve dans
les couches obliques de terre qu'on y observe les plus dures, ailleurs elles
sont pures, on trouve une de ces couches digne d'observation qui
paraît être de Bitume judaïque &c. pardon si j'ose vous ennuyer
par mes récits importuns je ne le fais que pour vous marquer
le desir que j'aurois de posséder quelque chose qui pu vous faire
plaisir, & le contentement que j'aurois en vous servant.
pour me prêter en même tems à mes intérêts je vous dirai —
Sincèrement que j'ai été dans une impatience continuelle de recevoir
de vos nouvelles; j'ai bien cru que c'étoit que vos occupations qui
pouvoient retarder vos bienfaits; je vous supplie donc de ne les
point interrompre pour moi; mais je vous prie en même tems
d'être persuadé que le moindre moment de trêve quelles vous donneront
employé pour moi me fera le plus grand plaisir du monde.
je suis et serai toute ma vie —



Votre très humble et très
obéissant serviteur Michel
Gabriel Paccard.

P.S. Comme je suis présentement à Turin jusqu'au mois de mai, si
pendant le tems vous me faites l'honneur de m'envoyer quelque chose
je vous prie de me l'adresser, sans vous servir de l'intermède du D^r Bellard;
et de le faire mettre à la poste; mon adresse est

A Paccard au Collège Royal des
provinces à Turin.

déscendu près de midi; on les a vu
passer à 4 heures sur une pente neige
du piedestal ou sous des pointes de roches
qui percent la neige, Site de la hauteur
du buet derrier et au dessus du glacier
de la gria. Mr de Saussure s'est fait
attacher comme un prisonnier pour
redescendre il étoit ceint par dessous les
bras par une corde attachée derrière
à Pierre Walmar et à François Folliquet
Couttet étoit devant pour mesurer
les pas par les siens; Jean Michel
Tourmer tenoit Mr Bourrit par le
collet à la nuque et il s'appuyoit sur
l'épau de Gervais, dans les mauvais
pas à traverser on faisoit des gardes
fols avec un baton sur le quel ~~nos pas~~
~~s'appuyaient~~ Mr de Saussure s'appuyoit
en montant et en descendant. Mr
Bourrit le fils presque malade se tenoit
à l'habit de Cudet en montant, ils ont
mangé du pain bu de l'eau et du vin
étranger en descendant ils sont
arrivés à la cabane à 6 heures.

le 7 juin 1786 Joseph Carrier
 Jean Michel Tournier, François
 Paccard
~~premier de jonas~~ sont allés ^{sous une balme assez bien} couchés
 à la montagne de la Côte ou Joseph
 Balmar des Baux les a joints ils sont
 partis de grand matin pour aller
 au mont blanc; le même jour
 Pierre Balmar, et Marie Courtet
 ont couché à pierre ronde au dessus
 de Bionnasset et sont partis aussi
 le 8 pour aller au mont blanc
 de la Côte de Bionnasset, il y a
 encore beaucoup de neige sur le
 Breven et à la Montagne de la
 Côte; Mais elle porte le matin
 ceux qui sont allés par la Montagne
 de la Côte sont arrivés les uns au
 pied de la dernière sommité du
 mont blanc dans la plaine et ont
 pénétré jusqu'au rocher qu'on y.

FACSIMILE OF DR. PACCARD'S DIARY.
 (page 44.)

Veuillez bien agréer les sentiments de
 parfait dévouement de votre très humble
 et obéissant serviteur

Le docteur Michel Gabriel Paccard
 qui a fait la première ascension au
 Mont-blanc.

FACSIMILE OF SIGNATURE FROM DR. PACCARD'S DIARY
 (page 67.)

Au très Reverend

Reverend père Hermenegilde

Pini Barnabite ^{à St Alexandre}

à Milan.

1 Notre voyage du 8 août 1786
arrivés à 6 heures 23 min ^{soit} - repartis à 6 h 57 m
ils y ont restés 34 min

2 Céli de Cachan-Tournier espagne,
Malmaison-montblanc le 5 juillet
1787

3 Céli de cur de Jussane ^{avec 19 guides} parti
le 1^{er} août 1787 - il a couché au sommet
de la montagne de la Croix le 2 au
plan du sommet ou d'un des sommets ou
il est arrivé à 6 heures, arrivé aux
^{glaciers} petits rochers le lendemain à 9 h.
7 minutes arrive au sommet
à 10 heures 50 minutes, descendu.

Aiguille du Midi, could have used the latter immediately after the former for a quite different peak on the far side of the Glacier du Géant. (Of course, it would alter the case if *contemporary* evidence for this use could be found.) In my view the phrase 'behind the Aiguille percée (*i.e.* the Aiguille du Midi)' is used broadly by Paccard, as it was by Exchaquet just about this time, for the region of the Vallée Blanche, and might quite well include the Petit Rognon and the Plan-Requin ridge. The argument based upon drawing a line on present-day maps through the Aiguille du Midi strikes me as pressing Paccard's word 'behind' too hard. Moreover there are no *three* specially noticeable pinnacles on the ridges of the Mont Blanc du Tacul, as there are on the Plan-Requin ridge. I think too that M. Chevalier underestimates the inferences drawn from the mention of the chamois 'getting down and crossing the glacier on their way to the Glacier de Talèfre,' and from Forbes's experiences in this same neighbourhood. M. Chevalier transfers both these to the slopes of the Aiguille du Tacul, but this in Forbes's case is definitely mistaken—he *did* get down to the Glacier du Géant by following chamois tracks through the séracs on the side of the Petit Rognon, which he names in his narrative and marks on his map. For these and other reasons I cannot see my way at present to accept M. Chevalier's very interesting conclusions.

AN ABSTRACT ALPINE SUBJECT.

BY CLAUD SCHUSTER.

(Read before the Alpine Club, March 6, 1934.)

I WAS once taught that to write an official minute was an easy thing if one obeyed three maxims: 'Begin at the beginning; go on to the end; then stop.' But this is no way in which to undertake either life, or that lesser part of it which is the adventure of the mountains. There is no end and there is no halting-place. Limitless before you 'gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades for ever and for ever as we move.'

In any event, my mentor's maxim has no application to the writing of an Alpine paper 'on an abstract subject,' which is the task set me by the Secretary. I propose, therefore, to be even more than usually discursive.

On Boxing Day, 1931, I was proceeding (as the police reports say) in a south-westerly direction along a slope above the main