AIGUILLES: THE TRAGEDY OF ÉMILE REY

BY A. CARSON ROBERTS

In 1893 I paid my first visit to the Chamonix Aiguilles after several holidays devoted to the Central Pennines and Grisons under the tutelage of Alexander Burgener, Weisshorn Biener, my old friend Peter Sarbach and others.

At that time the last of the unconquered Alpine peaks had just been falling in quick succession to the assaults of such men as Mummery, Morse and Émile Rey. The Aiguille de Grépon was almost the last to retain an untouched summit and was regarded as the most difficult rock-climb in the Alps. Mummery in 1881 had climbed its northern peak and thence also its southern summit, together with Burgener and his little acrobat friend Venetz; while in 1892 and 1893 Mummery had led on two complete traverses of the ridge. The only other ascents prior to 1892, as he tells us on p. 140 of his Climbs in the Alps and Caucasus, published in 1895, were by Monsieur Dunod who 'after a month of persistent effort' reached the southern summit by help of François Simond's clever rope-throwing tactics from the neighbourhood of Pic Balfour; by another party similarly led to the southern summit; by Morse, who with Hans and Ulrich Almer reached the northern peak in 1888 by a climb up slabs on the eastern face, thus avoiding the crack up which Venetz had led; and by Morse, Gibson, Pasteur and Claude Wilson, who in 1892 reached the southern top by Dunod's route.¹ Mummery states that the Grépon had defied all the other attacks made upon it: thus he and Venetz only had led up the famous crack, surmounting the first sheer step on the N. arête, which is now used by nearly all who make the climb.

I had engaged as guide Joseph, a younger brother of Alfred Simond of the Montenvers Hôtel, and with him made a number of delightful climbs. One of these was a traverse of the Grands Charmoz, a sister Aiguille closely linked with the Grépon. On it that mighty fellow Schaller, who was leading my friends Wherry and Aston Binns, helped me to reach a seat on the top of that pinnacle known as the Bâton Wicks, poised on the platform of the southern peak with part of its base reposing on air. This climb gave us close-up views of the Grépon—a majestic flake of

granite shaped like the two hands of a giant, held edge to edge with the fingers upright.

My own guide told me that he was not prepared to climb that peak. Schaller offered to 'try' for a fee of 500 francs and I could find no other who would go as far as that, except Alfred Simond who wanted a still higher price to leave his hotel for the venture. My purse was light, and the best I could do was to persuade young Joseph Simond to come on a reconnoitring expedition. He introduced as porter, Joseph Aristide Simond, who was keen to join us and had the physique and figure which should make a first-rate climber. Quite recently I have heard that he was a qualified guide a full year before joining me as porter.

So early one morning we tramped by candle-light across the 'Valley of Stones,' and breakfasted on that plateau of rock in the Nantillons Glacier where, I believe, a good shelter-hut now stands. We had no great difficulty in reaching the little gap above the Charmoz-Grépon Col immediately below which is the foot of the crack, but it was still very cold there on the W. side while powder snow was being blown about. I had been bracing myself on the way up to announce firmly that I proposed to attempt the crack, provided it looked at all within my compass. What I saw was a crack, wide enough for a foot or an arm, running straight up a smooth and perpendicular face of granite for about 70 ft. with one bend half-way up providing an obvious resting place; and this did not enlighten me much nor make me feel confident on the point. I took off my sack and hat and went to its base: there was no demur, Joseph the guide planted himself at the top of the gap and hitched the rope, while Joseph the porter came to give me a shoulder up. I have a clear recollection of great difficulty in gaining the first few feet after using his shoulder and up-reached hand. After that it was an exhilarating struggle, with the jammed right foot or knee always serving as the main anchor, and a continuous search for hold for the right hand inside the crack (sometimes an icy search): that hold had to be strong enough to support one against the pull needed to raise the anchor and plant it a few inches higher. I believe I was lucky in these searches; sometimes, where handhold was wanting, I found a firmly-jammed stone far in or was able to work a loose one into a safe position, but once or twice I had to trust largely to jamming my elbow into a hollow. Several times I shouted 'Es geht' to the anxious Frenchmen below. I do not think the left foot, although always scrabbling

2 Nowadays, the usual and easier method is to traverse horizontally to a point in the crack some 15 ft. above its base.
for rugosities, ever comes into useful play except at the resting place half-way up. Those who have climbed the Monolith crack on Griben, or that left-leg crack on the Napes Needle, will understand the kind of struggle needed. The all-absorbing fact on this climb (and on some others) is the early knowledge that out at the top is the only way to finish it alive. Little Venetz must have had good pluck, for the top part looks the more difficult.

When we had gathered on the fine platform above, we walked up to Burgener's ' Kanones Loch '—the hole appearing like a patch of snow from below—and passed through it into sunshine. I was not yet suffering from any foolish feeling of elation, because, viewed from the Charmoz, there was above us on this ridge another step quite as sheer and quite as long, with apparently no chance of circumventing it on either face. I had heard nothing of an inside course. While I was inspecting the eastern face one of the Josephs called attention to scratches leading into a cleft near the arete. After clearing one rather difficult bulge this led us up into that great granite crevasse seeming to extend far down into this part of the Aiguille. It provided easy climbing or jamming and brought us out high up on the Nantillons face. After that, other rifted flakes gave astonishingly easy access to the northern summit. The conspicuous, poised stone which stands on it looked to us impossible: I long to know whether we ought to have tackled it, and whether anyone has tied a banner to the pointed summit of this natural flagstaff.3 In views taken from below on the N. side, this stone is a most imposing object, towering apparently above the other points on the ridge. It is in fact some 6 ft. higher than the next highest part of the northern top but distinctly lower than the southern tower or summit.

We roped down into the deep cleft on the S. of this N. peak. My recollection of this is difficulty in avoiding a swing to the left on to the Nantillons face—a trouble easily avoided when there is someone holding the ropes below. It was an easy climb to the next peak on the ridge, and soon we stepped down on to that wonderful ' bicycle track ' a little below the ridge on its E. side. It is a smooth and almost perfectly-laid pavement of huge granite blocks. The granite work of nature all along this ridge is indeed marvellous—many of the fractures are rectangular and, if not long-weathered, their surfaces resemble the face of an ashlar. This ' track ' leads nearly to the notch below the highest summit, which, apart from Pic Balfour, is the southernmost point on the ridge.

When in this notch we saw a fine boss of rock some 40 or 50 ft. below us on the sheer Nantillons face, while an admirably hitched rope ran across it. There was a rock which made it quite possible to rope down to that boss, and it seemed to us that one party must have made a descent that way. Much of the face below the boss was out of view. We did not attempt the very difficult crack up which Burgener had helped Venetz on the first ascent of the summit, as we had been told that by traversing upwards to the right an easier way could be found. The route we took was certainly not an easy one, and I doubt if we went far enough to find the crack used by those who had come up by way of the southern arête. This bit remains in my memory as one of the hardest in the climb, needing at one place a specially difficult heave from the shoulder of the second man.

Alfred Simond, guessing that there was just a chance that we might get so far, had given his young brother instructions about this part, derived of course from brother François' descriptions of it. I had listened-in but had heard very little of it; as Alfred’s French ran as fast as did his feet upon the mountains—what a veritable chamois he was! My companions searched for, but did not find, François’ piton. I am afraid it was not a very determined search owing to our notion that there existed another route from the cleft below us on the north. I am as much to blame as any for the mistake we then made. I knew quite well that it was from the neighbourhood of Pic Balfour that the ascents on that side had been made; but the truth of the matter is that at this stage I gave way to that sense of elation and relaxation of effort which, I believe, is largely responsible for the fact that so many accidents happen on the descent. I was resting in a sheltered place quite ready to leave the rest of the work to my companions.

We returned to the cleft and, after some debate, I agreed to be lowered to the boss to report what possibilities of further descent I saw. I called back that the rope which we had seen, was short, had evidently lodged there by chance, that it was clearly possible to rope down to a ledge I saw below, but that the face below the ledge looked extremely difficult for a traverse to the south or for further descent. Joseph the porter came down hand-over-hand on the climbing rope plus the supplemental. He was more confident than I about the possibility of descent, and the tempting 'rake' sloping up to that point on the arête,

\[^4\] An untranslatable word, understood, however, by Lakes’ climbers. It is applied to sloping shelves running across rock or cliff ramparts—produced originally no doubt by geological rift and set-back of the upper structure.
known as 'C.P.', was but some 200 ft. below us—one of Dunod's ladders being a conspicuous object on it. The other Joseph, who was much the lighter weight, came down entirely on the light spare rope. On that boss a third man was de trop.

I can give no proper account of our climb from it to the 'rake' below. I remember how difficult it was to start the second rappel with three men crowded on that boss, also that there were few occasions, after leaving the next ledge, when any one of us felt secure. Certainly, it was a face climb which we ought not to have attempted and one which it is a nightmare to remember. I know that both the Josephs behaved splendidly, that each volunteered to come last on the most difficult descent, and that eventually we made a long traverse to the south which ended in some easy steps to the 'rake.' How many hours we were on that face I dare not guess, but I know we reached the north peak before 8.0 A.M. and must have attained the final summit about 9, while the afternoon was far spent when, after a rest and some thankful libations, we left 'C.P.', because after racing down I found the guests at dinner when I re-entered the Montenvers.

Mrs. Jackson was at the head of the table and there were Schusters, Webers, Pasteurs and many other climbers. Before I could escape by the inner door I was forced to confess that I had led. When I came down a little later I found a high pyramid of flowers in front of my place. I am afraid my good little guide did not have as happy an evening among his confrères: I heard that he was badly bullied. About twelve years later I met my porter J. A. Simond (dit 'le Grépon'), and was told that he was then the leading guide for that Aiguille.

Two years later I was helping to give a welcome to de Fonblanque at a late supper on his return from this traverse. In the course of the talk he said: 'Funny thing, I found this franc on the last summit.' I picked it up and rubbed it with a corner of the tablecloth; when I handed it back he read 'A.C.R. August 1893,' and said how desperately sorry he was that he had brought away my token. I was by no means so when, later, Stutfield put his hand on my shoulder and led me out, remarking 'Roberts, I'm mighty glad he brought down that franc.'

Before leaving the Chamonix district in 1893 I had two ideas for new climbs—one to find a way from the Petit Dru to the Grand Dru without the help of ropes lowered from above, and the other an ascent of the Aiguille du Géant by its N. face or by its N.E. arête. As I had no climbing friends of like mind
or keen on guideless work, I wrote to Émile Rey and at last managed to engage him from August 20, 1895.

On the 19th of that month I started from Zermatt at midnight, hoping to reach Zinal that day by way of the Moming Pass and to join Rey at the Montenvers on the evening of the 20th. As we were starting for the ‘arête blanche’—the third ascent of that climb—a fury of wind and snow swept up the Zinal Glacier; it tore off the hats we had bound down with scarves as we floundered before it, groping for a way through that much crevassed snowfield. At one time my guides were on their knees, but their vows were cut short by an angry and sacrilegious ‘Vorwärts.’ At last we glimpsed the sharp line of the arête above us, and very soon three ridiculous snowmen with icicles in their hair were laughing at the sight of each other and telling the furies on the other side of the ridge to do their worst. It was dark when we reached the Mountet hut.

At about 3 the next afternoon I arrived at Martigny and, as the poste had gone, I marched over the Tête Noire with my bags on a mule, reaching Argentière at about 9 P.M. Being very keen to keep my appointment with Rey I asked the hotel manager, while I supped, to find two sturdy porters who would carry my bags up by way of the Mauvais Pas and Mer de Glace. On reaching the Chapeau—the little refreshment booth below the Mauvais Pas—my porters turned in on the floor saying they would go no further but would be at the Montenvers before 7 in the morning. As the tiny bit of floor space that remained was far from tempting, I decided to jog on. It was a calm but dark night and I had no difficulty until I had got across the smooth and go-as-you-please ice in the middle of the glacier, but I failed to find the ‘polyglots’ track’ through the broken ice and crevasses on the other side, although I followed up the many clues provided by their discarded over-socks. It took me a longish time to cut a way off by lantern light and it was nearly 2 A.M. when, after climbing into the hotel, I managed to rouse Paul Couttet. It was by the classic ascent of the smoking-room window that I got in, but it was not a fair ascent of that ‘mauvais pas,’ because I used the head of my axe as a foothold!

After breakfast on the 21st I discussed my hopes and notions with Rey, who, I found, was housed in the hotel and not in the guides’ chalet. My French is vile, but he enunciated so clearly that I found it possible to converse better than I had ever been able to do with a guide before. He said he would like to see how I could deal with difficult rocks and, as the day was good, suggested that we should go at once and spend an hour or so
on the top rocks of the Petits Charmoz. I agreed gladly, particularly as I had played about on those not really difficult rocks and knew them well. A clergyman, a member of A.C. (was his name Carey ?), asked if he and three ladies might come with us and Rey was persuaded to agree.

That little expedition was not without incident. On leaving the rocks Rey led us to the top of a small hanging glacier facing the Mer de Glace and pointed to a narrow crack which ran all the way down. It was well filled with snow and made a white streak down the otherwise dark and shiny ice. He roped up with two of the ladies and told me to march in front making steps with my heels not too far apart. After inquiring whether my staircase suited the ladies and pacing down to about the middle of the glacier, I was pulled up by a yell which had in it more of the horror of imminent catastrophe than any I had ever heard. I saw both the ladies spreadeagled on the ice and Rey holding with all his might—axe and heels driven deep. Bringing the ladies back to the snow was a quick and easy job, but appeasing the anger of my guide was a different matter. Naturally I tied on to that short rope and did my best to hearten the ladies, who were badly shaken, possibly more by the furious words they had heard than by the very real danger which they, he even more, had escaped. I doubt if they realised from what his strong and prompt anchor-hold had saved them. Lower down I remember sweet-smelling glissades sitting on a low growth of junipers, rhododendrons, etc.

The next day, after making elaborate arrangements for camping out as long as the weather lasted, we toiled up to the gîte on the rocks in the Charpoua Glacier in company with Pech, his guides and our respective porters. The night was cold, and I, for one, failed to sleep on my stony couch. Our companions kept our spirits high as we started just before dawn. They proceeded up the snow for the Grand Dru and we dipped to the left to thread easy séracs to the base of the Petit Dru. We never uncoiled our rope that day. Many times, as we followed that interesting route up those fine rocks, Rey offered to send me down an end; but we had talked over this matter and agreed that, unless one is so much weaker a climber as to need support from the other, two are safer on rocks, as well as quicker, without the rope; and time and again in discussing the subject we came to the same conclusion.

We attained our peak very soon after Pech had reached his 66-foot higher top, and were able to shout messages to each other. The wall which barred our reaching him was festooned
AIGUILLE DU GÉANT FROM NEAR AIGUILLE MARBRÉES.
(Scene of fall marked ×)

Photo, W. F. Doukin.]
AIGUILLE DU GÉANT FROM GLACIER DU GÉANT.
(Scene of accident lies between the two asterisks.)
with many ropes. When I spoke to Rey of our plan for seeking a possible way up on its N. side, he said he did not feel in good condition for a severe effort, while I was feeling much more inclined for a snooze. I may mention that my hopes had also been shaken by the tales which Rey had told me of the great sums he had received for effecting new ascents. If my memory is right, Fontaine proved this climb to be possible a few years later.\(^5\)

The two parties got back to the gîte almost at the same time, and I can remember the joy of that orange, or was it a pear, which Peech gave me. We had instructed our porter to take our sleeping-sacks, etc., down to the glacier, leave them there while he crossed to the Montenvers for fresh provisions, and then to bring the lot to a point on the path up to the Couvercle where we would meet him—he was to take two journeys up if necessary. To our dismay we found that he had left our sleeping-sacks, cooking gear, etc., taking down only his own things. The splendid flood of French and Italian invective which Rey expended on the whole tribe of porters and their forbears is impressed on my memory because it lasted far down those slopes, coming out in fresh spate at each halt, when he called heaven to witness how we, who had climbed the mountain, were laden like mules. His load was a good deal heavier than mine.

To save going down to the glacier we traversed the rough intervening slopes, and shortly before striking the Couvercle path we saw our porter coming across the glacier. We waited for him in a tempting grassy nook and lit a fire. Of course, curses were hurled at him as he approached, but, in some way which I failed to grasp, he obtained rather speedy absolution. As the light failed we had what would have been a perfect meal in a perfect place but for the fact that Rey had no appetite. We turned in early where we were and no one waked until 4.0 A.M. I was struck by the completeness of Rey's ablutions in the stream near by; he took off his shirt and put his head into the water.

The Moine arête of the Aiguille Verte was the next item on our programme, but Rey said it was much too long a climb to start from where we were at so late an hour as 5.0 A.M. We, therefore, decided to go to the Aiguille du Géant and prospect. Parting from our porter at the foot of the path, we started up the glacier well laden with provisions, took the séracs of the Géant on their eastern side and climbed the rocks of La Noire to obtain closer views of the N. face of the great tooth. We

\(^5\) August 23, 1901.—Editor.
decided to inspect it from above also and made for the spur which descends westward from its base, depositing one well-loaded sack on the line between it and the Aiguilles Marbrées. We climbed the Géant unroped as we had climbed the Dru. In ascending the steep part of the tooth Rey put me in front and came close behind, watching how I used the rock-holds and the pitons driven in by the brothers Maquignaz.

We spent about 1½ hours on the top of the Aiguille du Géant, explored it a little way down at its eastern end and discussed possible climbs. Rey was not averse to attempting the N. face, but he talked much of a new climb on the Rochefort, which he was keen on trying. In spite of the fact that he had eaten very little since we left the hotel and had been troubled by continuous thirst, he was in excellent spirits. We talked of many things, and I remember that he joked about the need to get rid of the white bristles on his chin before being seen at the hotel: his hair was still black, but these made him look older; I think he was 49. It was warm and I greatly enjoyed our long halt on the summit ridge, but the weather beginning to look bad we decided to make for the hut on the col before it became really nasty. Fortunately, when a clear view came, Rey pointed out the rocks on which that hut stood.

Soon after we had rounded those minor teeth which stand out on the sky-line, he picked up a crystal from some running water: seeing it was a poor one he was about to throw it away, but handed it to me instead, saying, ‘Peut-être un souvenir.’ Those were his last words, and I have that poor little crystal still. About a minute later he found, at the edge of the terrace along which we were proceeding northwards, the head of a little chimney up which we had climbed—this was at about 4.15 P.M. At the foot of this chimney our route turned sharply S., at first on steep snow, where we had cut steps. When Rey was fully half-way down this chimney and I was waiting at the top, I heard one little ejaculation—an ‘ugh,’ suggestive of disgust or of pain—and saw him drop feet foremost on to the little base of the chimney, a downward-sloping stone powdered over with small pebbles, and slide off on to the steep snow slope below. Almost immediately and before his fall had gained much momentum, he came up against an outcrop of rocks, but, as far as I could see, made no effort to clutch them. His ice axe and his cap remained on those rocks. He struck one or two other patches of rock as his fall gained pace on the steepening slope, and then disappeared into the deep gulf below like a cartwheel in the air.

That little chimney is, I think, the only place where the climb
to the foot of the great tooth presents any difficulty, but it is not of a severity trying to the powers of any climber, much less an Émile Rey, as witness the fact that, in spite of the terrible sight I had just seen, I felt no nervousness in descending it. I instinctively picked up his axe and cap and, after traversing to the S., raced down the spine of that westerly spur. Rey had fallen to the N. of the spur which is climbed from the S., and there the glacier is much lower and the spur much steeper than on the south. I hurried down the N. side, tearing my clothes as I went on its peculiarly rough rocks. I got within about 200 ft. of him, but there was a sheer face between us. He had brought up on a slope of soft snow, but the deep groove above him was terribly stained, while one of his legs was bent back with the foot behind his head. I called to him for some time, begging him to move a hand if he could, but he made no motion of any kind that I could see.

I hurried back up the spur to try to reach him by a circuit on the snow. On the top I halted to settle a pocket compass and to get the exact bearings of the cabane, as a snowstorm was boiling up from the north. It closed on me just as I left the spur. It had not the fury of that which had caught us on the Morning Pass, but it was nearly as blinding. I tried to make a circuit, but after some minutes pulled up, just in time to avoid falling down a face of unknown depth. The next day I saw that this was a drop of some 200 ft., and that it needed a wide détour far out on the crevassed snowfield to avoid the abrupt snow or rock steps extending westward from the spur. Failing to find another way round in the blinding snow I had to give up my attempts to reach what, as I knew later, was certainly then a dead man.

Slowly, with careful steps and many halts to settle my compass, I groped my way to the hut, some 3 kilometres distant. I was lucky to escape the crevasses surrounding me at the start. The storm became lighter, but the sun had set before I reached the hut. I found the door fast on the inner side and, after knocking for some time and shouting, it was opened some inches to reveal two scared faces. They were two young French climbers who had come from the Montenvers and had been in the hut a long time. When they were satisfied that I was not a ghost, they were kindness itself. An account of their experiences on that day appeared about a month later in some French periodical, of which I cannot now remember the name; it gave a vivid description of the wild man who had come to them out of the storm in ragged clothes and covered with snow and ice.
I had a mad notion that Rey might still be alive, and I was aching to reach him. I tried to persuade these two climbers to come with me, and for some time we talked at cross purposes, I paying no attention to their tale until I caught the repeated words, 'Mais ne serait-il pas mieux de chercher les vivants que les morts?' Then I listened to what they had to say about a party of twelve and a party of two whom they had been expecting for hours. The twelve were a party of six Belgians or Dutch (three men and three women), with six Chamonix guides and porters, who were making for Courmayeur; the party of two turned out to have been Rey and myself. These young men had overtaken the twelve in the early hours of the morning and, when last seen, the latter were entering the séracs of the Géant Glacier.

Soon we were roped and ploughing through heavy snow, facing what was then a mild snowstorm. In something like 20 minutes we met the vanguard of this expedition—a rope of four or rather of two pairs. The leader was leaning forward with the rope over his shoulder and on his back part of the weight of a voyageur, and so was the third on the rope. The other two ropes were similarly engaged. We gave cognac to some and did our best to cheer them on.

As soon as I could, I got the leading guide apart and asked him to let me have two men to go to Rey. He said his men were utterly exhausted and that, if word got out that there had been an accident, his hopes of getting his party safely down to Courmayeur would be even slenderer than they were. Later on one of the Belgian gentlemen, who had been told, took me aside and said that the best he could do was to send one of his men down to Courmayeur very early in the morning to tell the guide-chef what had happened, and to arrange for a search party to come up. I wrote telegrams and messages for this man to take down. I may mention that Rey had talked to me of his wife and sons who lived within a mile of Courmayeur, at La Saxe; he was clearly very proud of his sons.

The other fourteen had some trouble in finding space for themselves in the sleeping-place. I did not try for any, but sat dozing by the fire and waking time after time with a nightmare that Rey had dragged himself to the hut and was blaming me bitterly for deserting him. When the others had left, I made a full entry in the hut book, with a black border round the page; I then turned in and slept until roused after three o'clock by the arrival of the first two men from Courmayeur. The others, with Rey's sons, were some way behind. So, leaving a note for
them to follow our tracks, I took the two and led them across the high snowfield to where Émile was lying under his shroud of snow. I turned before actually reaching his body and steered N.W. for the Montenvers route, as I was very anxious to see the sister and brother I had left there.

We soon descried a large party advancing rapidly up the glacier, and we met them somewhere near Le Rognon. They were the guides from the Montenvers led by Alfred Simond, and with them, I think, were Stutfield, Spencer, Schintz and my brother. When I had told my sad tale we sent the two Courmayeur men back laden with provisions to help in carrying down Rey's body. I shall never forget the pace at which Alfred took us through those séracs and what a relief it was to untie from his rope.

Mr. C. E. Mathews, who had arrived with Melchior Anderegg, asked me next morning to stroll out on to the glacier; there he took notes for the account of Rey's death, which he sent to the British Press. That evening I was startled by the news that the funeral was to take place at 11 A.M. the next morning. Schintz, who had with him Alois Pollinger and one of his sons, most kindly offered to join in an effort to reach Courmayeur in time. So we started at some unusually early hour, and did not halt for our second breakfast until we had reached the cabane on the col. As we were about to open our sacks a bell began to toll in the valley far below, and Schintz remembered that we were passing from French to Central European time, so that by our watches the funeral was at 10 A.M. We had 7000 ft. to descend and then some 2 miles of level road: so we cut out breakfast and hurried on at our very best pace. Just as we came in sight of the church door, the procession for the cemetery began to emerge. It was not yet 11.0 A.M. by our watches. I do not remember who the distinguished persons were who delivered long and eloquent orations by the grave in French and Italian.

When the ceremony was over an English visitor who lived in Genoa came and asked if one of us was the man who had been with Rey; he then told me that the Syndic desired my presence at an inquiry he was about to hold. When the necessary people had been got together, I handed in an account I had prepared in French, which my friend from Genoa read out, giving it to them later in Italian. They had many further questions to ask, and it was long after 2 P.M. when we got to the hotel for much-needed baths and food.

On our return next day we digressed to the place where Rey's body had rested. It is a deep gulf surrounded, except on the
N.W., by rather awesome ice walls almost sheer. I pointed out to my companions the little escarpment on which is the chimney from which he fell; their estimates of its height were from 1600 to 2000 ft., and I saw that the estimate I had given to Mr. Mathews was ridiculously low—600 ft. only.

I am fairly certain that this was not really a mountaineering accident, but a sudden physical seizure of some kind, while the great misfortune was that it came upon Rey at almost the only place on our descent from the Aiguille, where its consequences must be fatal. Had Rey been conscious he could certainly have checked his fall at that first rocky outcrop, as I was shouting to him to do. To me it seemed that he made no effort, and certainly he did not employ his axe strongly on the first snow slope; he lost his grip on it before he reached those rocks. Dr. Güssfeldt, one of Rey’s chief patrons, who asked me for the fullest details, was firmly of this opinion, although I told him that someone at the inquiry had said that flesh had been torn from Rey’s fingers. I can only think that this statement was prompted by the thought of the struggle such a man would probably have made to save himself.

Some mountaineers had much to say at the time about the ‘iniquity’ of climbing unroped as we had done. Undoubtedly, if there had been a rope between us at the time when Rey collapsed, I could not have failed to hold him as I was watching him from a flat and ample platform. But, as I pointed out to many, had we been roped, I would of course have been below and in snow steps, without a chance of holding. I well remember how one man, a little while after hearing this, said—thoughtlessly, I am sure—‘Poor Rey, you certainly should have been roped.’ Except when crossing the Charpoua Glacier, it was on rocks only that we climbed unroped. We were not only roped but double-roped where there was danger from crevasses.

Since writing this account I have seen the pages on the subject which appeared in the ALPINE JOURNAL (17. 561–2). This account, as stated, is based on the notes taken at the Syndic’s inquiry in Courmayeur. Though accurate in the main, it contains some words that are misleading; and it is easy to see how they came in.

1. The account states: ‘The weather looking bad Rey said that they would move more quickly if unroped. They accordingly coiled up the rope. . . .’ It is quite wrong to say that Rey suggested dispensing with the rope there or anywhere else. In the

6 A.J. 17. 568–70. A fine portrait of Émile Rey will be found in Pioneers of the Alps, 2nd edition, p. 132.
ascent and descent of the Aiguille du Géant that day we employed the rope for a few minutes only, *i.e.* on the little snow slope immediately under the tooth, loose snow on a slippery foundation and, *because* I told Rey that I was not happy in ascending it, he insisted on having me roped for its descent. Neither of us dreamt of using the rope for the easy descent thence to the snowfield. *(N.B.—I, no doubt, told the Syndic how we had agreed that on rocks we could 'move more quickly—and more safely—if unroped. ')*

2. I cannot have told the Syndic that Rey climbed down that chimney 'face outwards.' Possibly I may have said that he was *facing* outwards when he alighted on its base.

3. 'Dropped' is the proper word for describing how he came to that base. I can hardly think I said 'jumped or dropped.'

On that same day the best guideless climber was lost, as well as the man who, no doubt at that time, was the leading mountain guide. It was on August 24, 1895, that Mummery and his two Gurkhas passed out of ken on Nanga Parbat.