

NARRATIVE OF ASCENTS OF THE AIGUILLE VERTE AND
THE CHARDONNET IN THE YEAR 1865. By ROBERT
FOWLER.

WHILE I was descending from Mont Blanc on the 16th of September 1865, accompanied by Michel Balmat as guide, he proposed that I should engage Michel A. Ducroz and himself, and attempt the ascent of the Aiguille Verte. Ducroz had been up this mountain in the month of July in that year, as one of the guides of Messrs. Hudson, Kennedy, and Hodgkinson; accordingly we picked him up, and started on the afternoon of the 16th September, at 4 P.M. We left the Montanvert at 6; and reached the Pierre à Berenger soon after 9—doing the latter part of our way by the light of a lantern. A wall of stones is built round the overhanging sides of the rock, and we found a very comfortable bed of hay in the cave thus formed, as well as some wood left behind by former visitors. A roaring fire and some mulled wine inadequately prepared us for the attacks of a strong north wind, which penetrated through the chinks in the wall of loose stones, and compelled me to lie sleeplessly till we rose at 3 A.M. Nothing was to be gained by starting early, as the day did not dawn before 5 o'clock, and we could not get over much of our route by the light of a lantern. We set out therefore at 4.10, and crossing the glacier of Talèfre went straight up the Jardin, and then, turning a little towards the left, ascended the sloping snow-covered glacier towards the foot of the Aiguille Verte. This glacier presented no difficulties, and as we went over it, we gazed up at the rocks and ice couloirs of the Verte, and laid out our route. We saw before us two couloirs of ice coming down from the arête, called, I believe, Les Rouges, which connects the Aiguille Verte with Les Droites. Between these couloirs, of which that on our left was much the larger, there is a ridge of rock descending from a little pointed aiguille. It appeared to be practicable and free from all danger of falling stones, many of which lay about in the snow near the foot of the great ice couloir and under the rocks of the Verte itself. We agreed that when sufficiently high up to avoid the risk of stones we would cross the great couloir, and continue the ascent up the rocks of the Verte. This plan was afterwards considerably modified for the worse, for our difficulties were decidedly much increased by the change which we made, and at least an hour of extra time was consumed in the ascent. Reaching a comfortable place on the rocks, we stopped for

second breakfast at 8 o'clock, and in about half an hour set out again. Ducroz led, and continued the ascent by the ridge of rocks. They proved easy; but when we had reached a considerable height, we found those on our left too steep and smooth to allow of our reaching the great couloir, nor could we climb the pointed aiguille from below. We therefore had to turn to our right, and reached the arête of Les Rouges at the summit of the lesser couloir. Up to this time there had been no difficulty, and we had not even been tied together, but we were now driven by the impracticability of the southern face to search for a way round the northern side of the aiguille to the ice arête leading towards the summit of the Verte. Ducroz went forward by himself, but whatever the southern side of the range in fact was, the northern appeared far more difficult, and he soon stopped to consult with Balmat. The latter joined him, and in a short time they called on me to follow—over and among large rocks cropping out from the snow, some of them quite overhanging the glacier below, and seeming as if they were only held from toppling over by the grasp of the ice from which they projected. Turning to the left up a slope of snow we got to the summit of the pointed aiguille. We here found that we had a very steep descent down rock before we could get on the ice arête; the rocks were, however, sound and good, and we were soon upon it. The ice was hard and blue. Ducroz, who had the rope coiled over his shoulder, after asking me 'As-tu peur, monsieur?' sprang out to cut steps on the northern edge of the arête, holding on with one toe



over its edge, while his weight rested on the other foot. The cutting of steps proved so laborious, that he shortly proposed to

go along *à cheval*. While climbing the rocks, we all agreed that it was better not to be tied together; it would have impeded our movements, and as the rocks afforded us good hand and foot hold, being of hard gneiss split everywhere with cracks, which would allow of putting in the fingers and sometimes the whole hand or foot, I thought them so safe that the rope was not in any way necessary. Here, however, while going along the arête, and chiefly for the sake of Ducroz, who was cutting the steps, I thought it should have been used. Twice I proposed this, but met with no response from the guides. Ducroz had the rope coiled over his shoulder, and to take it off and attach ourselves would have been a difficult matter while on the arête; we should have done this when we finished the descent of the pointed aiguille, but Ducroz, who showed everywhere the greatest courage, had at once started forward to cut the steps. He acted as leader all through our ascent; but from his want of knowledge of the names of the surrounding mountains, I should think he had not been long a guide, though he told me he was upwards of forty years of age, and I doubt if he had ever before been a leader in a difficult expedition. We had laid out from below what we afterwards found would have been a shorter and easier route than that by which we ascended, and I think he showed a certain want of skill in continuing the ascent by the ridge of rock past the point at which it was practicable to cross the great couloir. But to return to our position on the arête. We had on our left the great couloir running down in a continuous sheet of ice to the Talèfre Glacier, and on our right a slope also of ice, with rocks jutting out here and there, not quite so steep at first, but apparently more so lower down, as it soon became lost to view. Below this slope lay the Glacier of Argentière, which, as well as the Talèfre, was 3,000 ft. below us. Ducroz and I, and I believe Balmat—but I did not look back to see what he was doing—went along



à cheval, dragging ourselves by the spikes of our axes or sticks. I, however, soon changed this for the extended posi-

tion in which a sailor gets out along a spar, having my elbows, knees, and toes clinging to the arête, which was very narrow. We went on thus till we had crossed above the great couloir: here the arête became steeper, and Ducroz proposed descending to the rocks a little way below us on our left. Eight or ten steps cut in the ice brought us to them; we went along the junction between the ice and rock till nearly under the summit, when we turned up the ice-slope again, and then a short way along the arête to the highest part, which was flat and had in consequence some snow on it. Here I saw two sticks with pieces of red ribbon left by poor Mr. Hudson and his party in July; we had picked up a blue handkerchief on our way up, and I tied it to one of the sticks. Mr. Hudson had ascended by a couloir leading to the arête connecting the Verte with the Moine, and reached the summit along this arête. But as his party, consisting of good mountaineers, were $26\frac{1}{2}$ hours, with but few and short halts, in making the ascent from the Couvercle, where they had slept, and returning to Chamouni, I should suppose their route was much more tedious and difficult than Mr. Whymper's, which required but 17 hours between the same points, or than that followed by me, which took a little less than 18 hours, including halts, from the Pierre à Berenger to the summit and back to Chamouni. Mr. Whymper, who made the first ascent with Christian Almer and Franz Biener as his guides, made use of the couloirs which flank the ridge of rocks by which I went up. I believe he ascended the lesser one on the right for some way, then crossed over to the great one, and went up it till it became ice, when he took to the rocks under the summit. He must have crossed these diagonally, as he reached the summit by the arête connecting it with the Moine. In September, when I ascended the Verte, the two couloirs were ice down to the very bottom, and no progress could have been made up them. Probably the rocks were easier, as they were more free from snow.

It was half-past 12 o'clock when we were at the top of the Verte; so we did not remain long, but roped ourselves for the descent of the short piece of ice down to the rocks. Taking off the rope, we descended these till we came to the narrowest part of the great couloir. As we approached this there were two falls of stones from above; a loud noise was heard, and looking up, we could see them bounding with frightful velocity; but on each occasion we could take refuge behind a rock which at least seemed large enough to protect us. At one time Balmat loitered behind looking for crystals, and dislodged a

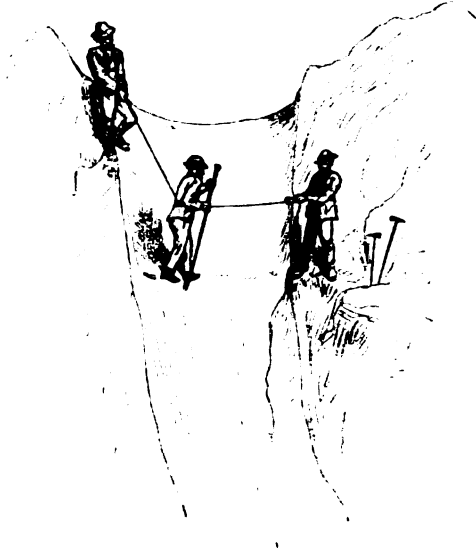
small stone, which fell down and struck me on the back of my head, cutting me slightly through my hat. When we reached the great couloir Ducroz cut steps across it, to the number of twenty or more; while doing this he was in a dangerous position, for if stones had then fallen down the couloir, it seemed doubtful if he would have had time to regain the shelter of the safe rock where Balmat and I were waiting. When all the steps were cut we two hurried over, and found ourselves on the ridge by which we had ascended, a little above the place where we stopped for a second breakfast. Nothing remarkable occurred as we retraced our steps down the rocks and over the glacier, now slippery with half-melted snow. It was nearly 5 o'clock before we reached the Jardin; and it was with the help of our lantern that we arrived at the Montanvert at half-past 8 P.M. We had to stay a short time there to settle our bill for supper the previous evening, and walked into Chamouni a little before 10 o'clock P.M.

I am sure that at least one hour was lost by our too long-continued ascent of the ridge of rock between the couloirs, which necessitated the turn to the right and the ascent of the pointed aiguille, as also the very slow and difficult passage along the ice-*arête*. I think the way followed by us in our descent to be far easier and shorter than that by which we went up; and probably the danger from falling stones might be avoided, were the traveller to set out earlier from the *Pierre à Berenger* than we did, so as to reach the summit and return to the glacier of *Talèfre* before 1 o'clock P.M., until which time the stones did not appear to me to fall. Perhaps if the upper part of this glacier were well known, the ascent might be made by light of lantern up to the rocks.

While we were on the summit of the *Aiguille Verte*, Balmat suggested that it would be desirable to go up the *Aiguille du Chardonnet*, which he said had never been ascended. Accordingly, with the same guides, I set out from *Argentière* on the morning of the 20th. After a long gradual ascent to the proper right of the glacier we came to the moraine of a tributary glacier originating in a couloir on the side of the *Chardonnet*, consisting at that time of very black ice. After half an hour's halt, at 6.30 we climbed the rocks to the left of the little glacier, which was itself on too steep a slope to allow us to make our way up it without step-cutting. Presently finding an easy couloir without any ice leading to the ridge overlooking the *Glacier du Tour*, we mounted it in hopes of finding some way to the summit of the *Chardonnet* on the side next that glacier; but on reaching the col we saw that the rocks of the *arête*

leading thence to the summit were too steep and too smooth to be practicable. To the glacier, however, it seemed possible to descend, and the guides tried to persuade me to go over this new pass and give up the attempt at the summit. I think they were both tired; and Ducroz certainly showed but little of the energy he displayed on the Verte. However, as we had still plenty of time, I insisted on returning to the route we had laid out from below. This we did, descending towards our right by another couloir free from ice or snow, which brought us to the black ice couloir. Here we stopped at 12 o'clock to dine, and in half an hour started for the summit. Keeping along the edge of the black ice, we ascended with it on our right, and soon found to our great joy that there was another couloir leading up at the back of the smooth rocks, which had hidden it from our view when below. There was some snow in this couloir, and we went up along it and the rocks on our left, till we again reached the ridge running from the Chardonnet towards the north-west. We now turned up along the arête, which here is easy, and is formed of ice towards the Glacier du Tour and of rock towards that of Argentière, till we came to a lesser peak, separated from the higher part by an arête of ice, rounded gently on the side towards the Glacier du Tour. Here I proposed that we should make use of the rope. Ducroz carried it, and proceeded to uncoil it, but somehow he managed to tangle it a good deal. It was a long Alpine-Club rope, which had been given as a present to Balmat by some former tourist. After many efforts to unravel the tangle, Ducroz suddenly threw it on the ground, took off his coat, and danced upon it and the rope, screaming out what I suppose were oaths in his patois. Balmat and I laughed heartily at his rage, and when he quieted down a little, helped him to undo the knots. A few steps had to be cut to reach the top of the arête, which is wide. We then came to some steep rocks, then to another arête of ice still easier than the last, and afterwards ascended by rocks to what seemed from below to be the highest peak. But here we saw, still farther on, a peak considerably higher, connected with that on which we stood by a short arête of ice, the sharpest I ever saw. It was the top of a couloir, which reaches straight down to the glacier between the Chardonnet and the Aiguille d'Argentière. Some ten or twelve ft. down rocks projected here and there through the ice; so we let down Balmat by the rope to one of these, while Ducroz and I held on above. Balmat then cut steps across. The couloir was so steep that as I followed my left shoulder brushed against the ice. Ducroz and Balmat,

one on each side of the couloir, held the rope, to which my belt was attached by a ring. Ducroz would not come after us, but stopped on the lower peak till we returned. After crossing



this couloir there was no further difficulty, and at 2 o'clock Balmat and I stood on the summit. The view was magnificent—the aiguilles of Argentière and Verte being close at hand. It was very similar to, but I think not quite as fine as, the view from the Verte. Not a cloud was in the sky. On a flat stone at the summit Balmat and I put a few stones, with a bottle in the middle of them; for we had not time to make a regular stone man. Ducroz left his handkerchief, with a stone laid on it, on the rock where he had stopped. We returned as we went up, excepting that we made some use of the little sloping glacier which had been on our right at the commencement of the ascent. We rested half an hour at its foot, ate our supper, and set out again: evening was coming on, and I was very lame. A loose stone, that turned as I set my foot on it, had struck me on the side of the leg. Our progress was slow, and it was nearly dark when we reached the place where our lantern had been deposited. Balmat at once found it, and, lighting it, we continued our descent. We did not get to Argentière till 9 P.M.: here we hired a char, and drove down to Chamouni. This was the first ascent which had been made of the Chardonnet, and it is certainly strange

that, with virgin peaks each year getting scarcer, a mountain considerably more than 12,000 ft. high close in view of the Col de Balme should have been left untouched. The ascent is not so difficult as that of the Aiguille Verte, and, I should think, is free from any danger from falling stones.

THE SWISS 'ALPENCLUB.'

THE valuable annual publications of the various foreign Alpine Clubs being—partly perhaps from the language in which they are written—less known in this country than they deserve, we propose in the following pages to lay before our readers a *résumé* of a portion of the contents of the last (4th) 'Jahrbuch des Schweizer Alpenclubs,' for 1867-8, which appeared during the spring of this year.

The proceedings of the Club since 1866 are first described in a paper by Dr. F. von Tschudi, from which we learn that the summer of 1866 proved very unfavourable to the designs of the members, and that but little was, in consequence, accomplished towards the exploration of the district ('Exkursions-Gebiet'), specially chosen at the general meeting at Chur, as the object of detailed investigation, viz., that section of the Central Alps comprised between the passes of the Great St. Bernard and St. Théodule. The area originally set apart had been subsequently restricted to the Mont Blanc de Cheillon group, between the Col de Fenêtre de Chermontane, and the Col de Colon, its west portion having been already more or less thoroughly explored, whilst the east division, extending from the Col de Colon to the St. Théodule, was left for another year. The Vice-President—the well-known Herr Weilenmann of St. Gallen—undertook in the autumn of 1865 a preliminary reconnaissance of the 'Exkursions-Gebiet,' whilst the preparation of a special 'excursion-map' on a scale of $\frac{1}{80000}$ based upon the original Federal survey, with contour lines at intervals of 100 ft., was entrusted to the firm of Wurster & Co. of Winterthur—already so famous for their cartographical publications. Considerable attention was also devoted by the Committee to the establishment and organisation of guide corps and the arrangement of tariffs, especially in the sections Rhätia, Tödi, and Monte Rosa. Investigations into the nomenclature of remoter valleys, especially near the points of contact of different languages, were set on foot, and lastly, in order to stimulate the zeal and economise the efforts of the members, a pamphlet was issued, containing suggestions for observers on a variety of