

up and improving it, as occasion offers, on the lines I have indicated. But, lest I should end in a tone of over much humility, I shall tell you that the Alpine Club has at least produced one rare book. The third volume of the 'Alpine Journal' has long been out of print; it is not easy to meet with at all, and it is very difficult to get a perfect copy with the plates. My own is without them, which I lament mainly for the sake of the delightful cat-faced dragon reproduced from Scheuchzer's 'Itinera Alpina' (1723). The original, which we also have in the library, is now, I believe, quite as likely to be procurable as the reproduction.

THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE AIGUILLE BLANCHE
DE PEUTERET.

BY H. SEYMOUR KING.

(Read before the Alpine Club, February 2, 1886.)

SINCE the melancholy death of Professor Balfour in 1832 I had been filled with a keen desire to make an attempt on the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret; but various circumstances concurred to prevent my visiting Chamonix until last season, when I determined to commence my holiday in that region, resolved to make the ascent of the peak if it were in any way practicable.

On July 24 last I crossed over the Col du Géant, accompanied by my guides Ambrose Supersax and Aloys Anthamatten, but the wind being too high that day to allow of the ascent of the Dent du Géant, we determined to spend the afternoon in the hut on the Col, and closely examine the mountain with the object of seeing whether a practicable route might not be found from that side. We had excellent glasses, and from the top of Les Flambeaux were able to get a good view of this side of the mountain. Two or three routes appeared to us to be feasible, save for the ceaseless danger of stone avalanches. Having nothing to do we were able to devote many hours to watching this side of the mountain, and came to the conclusion that any attempt on that side must be of an extremely hazardous nature, involving a risk, which, in our judgment, no mountaineer had any right to run.

The next day, after ascending the Géant, we went down to Cormayeur, with the intention of prosecuting our inquiries on the other side of the range. Monday and Tuesday

were occupied by another expedition, but Wednesday afternoon was given up to a careful examination of the district by Supersax and Anthamatten from the top of the Aiguille du Châtelet, and in the evening they gladdened my heart by the information that they thought they had discovered a feasible route.

Emil Rey chanced to come into Cormayeur that evening over the Col du Géant and, as he is the chief local guide, and one who, I knew, had expressed a desire to make an attempt on the peak, I offered him, as a matter of courtesy, the opportunity of going with us, an offer which he gladly accepted.

All our preparations completed, and two porters having been engaged to carry our impedimenta, we started at 4 A.M. on Thursday, July 30, for our destination. It was a beautiful morning, and Rey determined that nothing should be wanting on his part to keep up our spirits. So when passing the cemetery just outside Cormayeur he cheerily drew our attention to the grave of poor Petrus and of another victim of the Glacier du Brouillard, giving us a detailed account of both accidents, with the object, I presume, of strengthening our nerves for the task before us, and hinting that if burial were before us we might have a worse cemetery.

We walked briskly through the woods of the beautiful Val Vény, until, turning off to the right, just before the big moraine is reached, we crossed the stream and made for the icefall of the Glacier du Fresnay where it pours over at the foot of the Aiguille du Châtelet: up the left-hand side of this we scrambled over somewhat slippery mingled rock and grass until we reached the upper alp at eight o'clock. As our porters were very heavily laden we had to move slowly, and to this, and the fact that time was practically of no object, must be ascribed the singular deliberation of all our movements on that day. Here, therefore, finding a pleasant stream we rested for an hour and a quarter, and at half-past nine proceeded slowly upwards over moraine and loose stones, crossing two snow patches *en route*, one of which is I believe dignified by the title of Glacier du Châtelet, and at 11.30 reached the edge of the great Glacier du Brouillard. The sun was hot, we were all very thirsty, and, as Rey said it would not take us more than three hours to reach the *Schlafplatz*, we thought we might as well lie down in the shade for an hour. The sequel showed that Rey had considerably underestimated the time necessary for reaching that pleasant spot, but the delay did not cause us practically any incon-

venience. Leaving the shade of the rocks at 12.30, we roped and started up the glacier, which for two hours, though rather steep, was very plain sailing. Here we had to give the porters another rest, and as the rocks which Rey had fixed on as our sleeping place did not appear very far distant, we did not see any reason for hurrying. Soon after leaving our resting place, however, we began to get into difficulties; the glacier was tremendously crevassed, and we had repeatedly to turn back and seek some other route, in order to turn a crevasse or avoid some towering sérac. One of our porters, too, began to get alarmed, and kept beseeching us to turn back, assuring us that the only result of going further must be the death of the whole party. After an hour and a half of this work, we found ourselves at the edge of an enormously wide though not very deep crevasse, which it was impossible to cross except by cutting down the side of it and passing under a series of gigantic séracs, from which the ice was falling all the time, and then cutting up again on the other side. Here the last remnant of the porter's courage gave out, and just as we were in the most dangerous part, expecting every moment a block of ice from overhead, he prostrated himself in the snow, and burst into loud sobs; entreaties were unavailing, threats produced quite as little effect, and it was only on my ordering that the rope should be taken off, and the man left to his fate, that he was brought to reason. He tottered feebly on, and we fortunately extricated ourselves from what might have been a very serious mishap, as we had hardly got to the other side before a huge block of ice descended on the spot where we had been standing. We had now reached nearly the end of the glacier and were just under the Col du Fresnay (if I may so christen a small col leading from the Glacier du Brouillard straight down into the Glacier du Fresnay), but the last snow-slope was separated from where we were by a formidable bergschrund, and to cross this took a great deal of time and skill. A few minutes more brought us to the summit of the Col, and at our feet, more than a thousand feet below, lay the narrow Glacier du Fresnay. It was over this col and down the precipitous slope leading to the glacier that poor Professor Balfour went on his memorable journey, after having slept among the rocks more than half an hour lower down the Glacier du Brouillard.

We reached the Col at five o'clock, and turning sharp to the left followed the arête for half an hour. The rocks were

not very easy, and were rendered more difficult by the water which was running over them from the melting of the ice-slope, of which they formed the fringe. At last we came to a place about five feet by four which appeared to us the best suited to camp in for the night. The altitude shown by my aneroid barometer was 12,300 feet; and as it appeared extremely doubtful whether we could find water higher up (a doubt, by the way, which was subsequently converted into a certainty), we determined to pass the night there. Rey, however, went on along the ridge for some distance, partly to see if a more suitable spot could be found and partly with the object of exploring the locality in view of the work which lay before us the next day. As this district is but little known it may be interesting to the members of the Club if I attempt to give some description of the lie of the land; and indeed without some such description it will be very difficult for anybody unacquainted with the district to understand our subsequent movements.*

We were seated on a narrow ledge of rock facing the Aiguille Blanche de Peuteret, but separated from it by a narrow glacier lying at our feet more than 1,500 feet below us, to which the rocks on either side sloped precipitously down. Imagine a lane shut in on each side by lofty houses, and yourselves seated on the parapet of one of them, and some slight idea of our situation will be formed. Behind us to the right lay the Glacier du Brouillard, and immediately at our back, rising to the left, rose a steep ice slope, leading to rocks which form a spur of the Mont Blanc de Cormayeur; the end of the valley on this side was shut in by that mountain, at the foot of which lay the upper Glacier du Fresnay, a broad, level stretch of snow connected by a narrow icefall with the lower glacier of the same name.

The upper Glacier du Fresnay forms the basin of an amphitheatre, of which, to one facing it from the bottom of the icefall, Mont Blanc de Cormayeur forms the back, and the ridge running down to where we were sitting the left-hand wall. On the right hand there was, between the spur running out from the Mont Blanc de Cormayeur and the Aiguille Blanche, a break forming a gap leading over to the Glacier

* Since I wrote this paper my attention has been drawn to Mr. Eccles's account of his ascent of Mont Blanc in 1877 (*A. J.*, vol. viii. pp. 409-18). He seems to have followed the same route as that we took up to the col leading to the lower Glacier du Fresnay; but I am unable to trace exactly, from the terms of his description, whether he took the same course as that by which we gained the upper glacier.

de la Brenva; and it was from this col that we had determined to make our ascent on the morrow, the only doubt in our minds being whether we could reach it by any other way than by descending to the glacier at our feet, and climbing up by the side of the icefall—an exceedingly hazardous expedition, which had once been attempted by Rey, when, according to his account, he very nearly lost his life.

The side of the Aiguille Blanche facing us, up which Professor Balfour had attempted to go, was manifestly out of the question; from the ledge where we were sitting we could see avalanche after avalanche of stones thundering down the sides of the mountain and sweeping its whole side. These avalanches never ceased the whole night long, except, perhaps, for a couple of hours in the middle of the night; and I cannot think that any man who had passed the night where we did would ever have ventured upon trying the ascent on that side. I can only attribute the fatal ending of Professor Balfour's expedition to the fact that he slept out of sight of the Aiguille Blanche, some way down (as I have said before) on the Glacier du Brouillard. Our situation was not an enviable one, the cold being very great, my thermometer registering 20 degrees; but we made ourselves as comfortable as we could, three of us sitting or lying on the little patch of rock above described, with a low wall of rock about four feet high at our back, and the ice-slope rising above and beyond it. Anthamatten found a hole among the rocks a little way down, into which he crept, and the two porters stretched themselves on a ledge at the foot of the ice-slope. Except Anthamatten, on whom apparently cold has no effect, none of us closed our eyes, but we sat and smoked stolidly until five o'clock next morning. Earlier than this it was not possible for us to move, as the ridge of the Aiguille Blanche lying to the east of us shut out the light of the rising sun and kept us in darkness, and of course we could not commence the ascent of a steep ice-slope by the light of a lantern. Starting then at five we followed the arête for a short distance further, and then turning sharp to the left began to cut our way up the ice-slope to the ridge of rocks above mentioned, running down from Mont Blanc de Cormayeur. The slope was somewhat long and the ice very hard; then, too the rocks, when we reached them, though very sound and good, were by no means easy to climb. We had hoped that some way might be found at their base by going to the right and thus reaching the upper Glacier du Fresnay in the neighbourhood of the icefall, but after following this route

for a little way we found it quite impracticable, the rocks being ground smooth by the ice and affording no hand- or foot hold. All this occupied considerable time, and it was not until 8.30 that we found ourselves at the summit of the ridge, at a height little short of 14,000 feet, from which a precipitous wall of ice stretched down for 2,000 feet at least to the upper Glacier du Fresnay. This slope appeared very formidable; it was exceedingly steep, and reminded us a little of the slope on the Aiguille Verte side of the Col des Courtes. It was broken in places by little patches of rock jutting out of the snow; but, unpleasant as the descent looked, it was the only way; so after some anxious consultation we decided to attempt it. Cutting our way down from one patch of rocks to another, with infinite care and great labour we managed at last to reach the glacier, not however without running some considerable risk from falling stones. The descent occupied two hours, and when, as this year, there is little snow, will always require the greatest care; the last part is, I think, the most dangerous, owing to its greater exposure on many sides to stones and ice avalanches. We all congratulated ourselves on reaching the snow-field of the upper Glacier du Fresnay, and being then somewhat ravenous sat down in the snow and had a good meal. Not much time for rest, however, was allowed me, as the guides prophesied ominously that we should have to pass the night there; 'then,' they said, 'we shall have to spend the time until next morning in dancing to celebrate our victory, and keep ourselves warm;' for by that time we felt persuaded that the ascent would be accomplished. The snow was somewhat soft, but we made pretty good time across it, going straight for the col above described, leading to the Glacier de la Brenva. Here we left most of our impedimenta, and prepared for our final tussle with the enemy. From the summit of the col we cut our way up a short ice-slope and got on the rocks leading to the first *gendarme*; the rocks were rather rotten, but we were not long in reaching its foot, and continuing to ascend found ourselves obliged to cross a narrow snow arête leading to the second *gendarme*, and rendered very dangerous from a large cornice and the great steepness of the slope on either side. This was perhaps the most dangerous part of the whole expedition, or at any rate was so considered by Supersax. However, we crossed it safely, using every precaution, and skirting the base of the second *gendarme* again found ourselves on the rock arête leading towards the final peak. Keeping to the rocks we crept along until we

reached a short ice-slope, up which we cut, and found ourselves on the last rocks below the snow summit. These rocks were extremely rotten, and I should say had never been disturbed since they were deposited there; luckily, however, they were not long, and soon we were on the last snow-slope. Here, all difficulties being passed, I took the lead, and in ten minutes more stood on the summit of the mountain. The guides had among them with great trouble dragged up an alpenstock; this we set up as a flagstaff, and fastened to it an Italian flag, drinking the traditional bottle of champagne to our noble selves. It was now two o'clock, and obviously if we were to reach our sleeping-place before dark we had no time to lose. First, however, we spent a little time making a careful search among the rocks to see if there was any bottle or other trace of a previous visitor; nothing, however, was discovered, and from the condition of the rocks, as above described, I do not think it at all probable the place had ever been visited before.

We deposited our names in the bottle, and after carefully concealing it, started on our homeward track, following the same route as that by which we had come. The return journey took us five hours and a half: the ascent of the ice-slope leading to the arête of the Mont Blanc de Cormayeur occupied a good deal of time, and it was rendered somewhat dangerous by falling stones. The stones here, however, fall singly and not in avalanches as on the two sides of the Aiguille Blanche. It was nearly dark when we reached the ice-slope at the back of our *Schlafplatz*, the sun had melted our footsteps, and the descent was by no means easy. The timid porters, who had begun to give us up as lost, hailed us with loud shouts, and we soon had a fire blazing and our wet boots off. It was of course too late to think of attempting to cross the Glacier du Brouillard, and there was nothing for it but to sit and shiver for another night at the old spot. The cold was even greater than on the preceding night: our boots were frozen so hard that it was necessary to put them into the casserole in the morning to thaw them before we could get them on, and the water which we had drawn overnight for our morning chocolate was a solid block of ice. To add to our discomfort it began to snow gently at three o'clock, and a thick fog came up the valley and wrapped everything in darkness, so that it was long past five before we were able to see sufficiently to make a start. We got off at last, and, pushing on briskly, by half-past nine were once again in the valley. As I was very

tired, and by no means sure in the feet, I preferred not to face the descent by the side of the icefall of the Glacier du Fresnay. Rey said that he knew of a better way, and we followed the Glacier du Brouillard to its extremity and descended on that side of the Aiguille du Châtelet. We did not gain much, the descent on this side being no improvement and the distance considerably longer. On getting into the valley I could not resist saying, 'Val Veni, vidi, vici ;' but the Club will, I hope, pardon the weakness of the joke, and ascribe it to the weariness of spirit by which I was overcome at the moment. We walked briskly down the valley to Cormayeur, cheering ourselves with thoughts of soup and bed. My clothes were in rags, and my chief desire was to get into the hotel as quietly and promptly as possible. Some one had, however, spied us on the top, and our entry into the village was signalled by the conventional cannon shots; the hotels were full, and the streets lined with groups of Italians who welcomed us with the greatest enthusiasm. We found our own hotel decorated with flags, and I must take this opportunity of thanking most warmly the kind-hearted Italians for their enthusiastic welcome. Thus ended the longest and not the least pleasurable excursion I have ever made in the Alps.

THE GREAT PEAKS OF THE HIMALAYA.

THE following extracts from one of the Reports recently issued by the Surveyor-General for India will be studied with interest by all mountaineers. Mr. D. W. Freshfield has added some remarks and suggestions, and a note on the various names given to the highest measured mountain.

Extract from the Narrative Report of Lieut.-Col. H. C. B. TANNER, S.C., Deputy Superintendent, Survey of India, in charge Darjeeling and Nepal Boundary Surveys;—season 1883-84.

The survey of this interesting section of the Himalayas has been going on in a desultory way for the past twenty years, and I have much satisfaction in reporting that it has now been completed, and that the maps, most skilfully and artistically drawn by Mr. Peyton, are nearly ready for publication. These maps, three in number, embrace a tract on which several surveyors and others from time to time have been engaged. First and foremost came Dr. (now Sir Joseph) Hooker, who, about the year 1842, made a reconnaissance survey of Sikkim and a portion of Eastern Nepal. His sketch extends from the Donkia and Chola passes on the north-east to Khambachen and the Walauchoon passes on the north-west. Hooker's sketch remained un-