

described. The peak showing through the gap to the left of the illustration is the easily ascended Stronna; the mountain with the jagged arête we hope awaits a future visit for a first ascent, as also the sharp aiguille on the right, to which my camera has hardly done justice.

Perfect weather, perfect training, perfect peaks were all present, but the fourth necessity—time to climb them—was not ours. Alas! the first step downwards would be the first step homewards. Time flies quickest when one is happiest; so four hours on the summit passed like one. Starting down at 2.45 P.M., on reaching the foot of the gully we continued its direction S. to the bottom of the valley; following the latter N.E., we were soon at the margin of the Higraf-fjord, and reached Langstrand at 7.45 P.M. We were to have been met by a boat from Svolvær, but owing to a hitch in the arrangements one had come for, and returned without, us. Our only chance was to catch the 'Röst,' a mile away, in 35 minutes, in which time our camp was struck, everything bundled into a boat, and shouting, gesticulating, and rowing our hardest, we just intercepted the steamer as she was moving away from Sildpolnes. Rowing at midnight from Kabelvaag to Svolvær, we packed in the early hours of the morning, and caught the s.s. 'Astræa' for Bergen, at 6 A.M., in an equally exciting and undignified manner.

Thus ended our first, but we hope not our last, visit to islands where beauty of scenery and first-class rock-climbing are only matched by the charming hospitality of its unspoilt inhabitants.

THE EARLY ASCENTS OF MONT BLANC.

By C. E. MATHEWS.

AN extremely interesting bit of Alpine archæology has recently come to light. It consists of two pieces of paper of 8vo. size, on which are written an account of the attempt to ascend Mont Blanc by Jacques Balmat on June 28, 1786, and following days; the actual ascent by Balmat and Paccard on August 8 in the same year; the further ascent by Balmat on July 5, 1787, with two companions (Jean Michel Cachat and Alexis Tournier); the ascent by Saussure and eighteen guides on August 3, 1787; and a list of the further ascents made by various climbers, ending with that of the Honourable E. Bootle Wilbraham on August 3, 1830.

This valuable fragment was until recently in the possession

of Monsieur A. Gex, of Les Houches, and is alleged to be in the handwriting of Jacques Balmat. M. Gex wrote some time since to the Honorary Secretary of the Alpine Club informing him of the discovery, and that the document would be placed at the disposition of those who might wish to see it, or even to acquire it. The manuscript itself has not been sent to this country, but a careful photograph of it has been prepared by M. J. Vallot (of the Observatory of Mont Blanc), and a print of the photograph has been sent to the Honorary Librarian, and carefully examined by him and by the Honorary Secretary. These gentlemen have been good enough to ask my opinion both of the genuineness and the value of the treasure trove in question, and by their request I have the pleasure of communicating the views I have formed to the readers of this Journal.

In the first place, there is no reason to doubt that the manuscript is in the handwriting of Jacques Balmat. It is a 'crabbed piece of penmanship,' badly written and badly spelt. No one could have forged it, as it is full of trifling inaccuracies which a forger would have been careful to avoid.

Again, it is well known that Jacques Balmat did leave behind him in writing some relation of his attempts to ascend Mont Blanc, and of his final success. It is clear that the manuscript in question is not such a relation. It may have been notes for it, or a few memoranda hastily put together for a specific purpose.

The following is an exact translation, except as regards the spelling, which has been corrected :—

Jacques Balmat was on the Dôme du Goûter for the first time on June 28, 1786, quite alone. In descending towards the foot of the Montagne de la Côte I encountered three men, who also were going exploring, who invited me to ascend again with them. After having promised to go with them, I went home to get some provisions. I started again at 11 P.M. of the same day to rejoin them at the top of La Côte, where I arrived at 2 A.M. of the fourth day, and we started at once. We arrived at noon on the Dôme du Goûter, having been caught in mist and having seen two men on the Aiguille du Goûter. We called to them, and they made us understand that they wished to join us. During this delay I started off quite alone, ascending by the Arête Blanche, to seek out the way. I arrived very near the summit, but I could not reach it because of the mist which covered it. I descended again to rejoin my companions on the top of the Dôme du Goûter, but did not find them, as they had already descended, leaving me quite alone. Then I mustered courage to ascend again, but on the left side. Having arrived very near Mont Blanc, and having seen the Val d'Aosta and

the mountains, Mont Blanc being all covered with mist, I was forced to descend again to the Grand Plateau, where I encountered the night and a great crevasse, which I had crossed in the morning by a bad bridge that I could not find again owing to the darkness. I was obliged to climb up above a crête for fear of being crushed by the ice, and to pass the night there at 1,455 toises above the Priory and 1,786 toises above the sea. Here I passed the fourth night, and had my clothes and the handkerchief round my face frozen, and I beat my hands and my feet all night. Next morning, having seen that the sun could not clear away the mist from the summit of Mont Blanc, I returned to Chamonix. It was not till some days afterwards that Dr. Paccard invited me to make the attempt. We started on August 7, 1786, and did not arrive till 6.30 P.M. We remained 92 minutes on the summit. We descended to the Montagne de la Côte, arriving there at 11 P.M. on August 8, and at Chamonix at 8 P.M. on the 9th. I went twice to the summit of Mont Blanc on August 8, 1786; the third time I went on a commission from M. de Saussure, on July 5, 1787, with two companions; the fourth time was on August 3, 1787, with de Saussure and eighteen guides.

5th. Mr. Beaufoy, English. August 18, 1787. Ten guides.

6th. Mr. William Woodley. August 5, 1788. Twenty-two guides.

7th. August 10, 1802. M. le Baron Dorthesen, eight guides, and M. Forneret, of Lausanne, Swiss.

8th. July 14, 1808, with my two sons, Ferdinand and Jean, aged fourteen; also Victor and Michel Tairraz, Pierre Marie Frasseron, and Maria Paradis (girl). Jacques Balmat, director (surnamed Mont Blanc).

July 25, 1811. Five men in number to set up the standard, by orders of the French Government of Bonaparte.

9th. August 4, 1818. M. le Comte Matzewski, of Poland. Eleven guides.

10th. September 10, 1812. M. Rodatz, of Hamburg.

11th. July 12, 1819. Dr. Rensselaer and Mr. Howard, of the United States of America.

12th. August 13, 1819. Mr. Undrell, captain in the English navy.

13th. August 20, 1822. Mr. Frederick Clissold, English.

14th. September 4, 1823. Mr. Jackson, English.

15th. August 26, 1825. Captain Markham Sherwill, of Fontainebleau, and Dr. Edmund Clarke, of London.

16th. August 3, 1830. Hon. E. B. Wilbraham, English.

17th. July 25, 1827. Mr. Charles Fellows and Mr. William Hawes.

18th. August 6, 1827. Mr. Auldjo, English.

19th. July 25, 1811. Five in number, to set up the standard.

Now, the first part of the narrative tallies in all respects with the account given by Balmat to Alexander Dumas, and

published by him in the year 1832 in his book 'Impressions de Voyage Suisse.' But other and important details follow.

When Balmat left his companions on the Dôme du Gôûter he tried to ascend the mountain by what is known as the Bosses ridge. It is not true that he 'arrived very near the summit,' as he must have turned back at the foot of the Bosses, at least an hour and a half from the top. When, however, he returned to the Dôme du Gôûter, in which direction did he proceed?

In the Dumas story it is stated that he 'crossed the Grand Plateau and came to the Brenva Glacier, from which he could see Courmayeur and the Valley of Aosta.'

Did he go by the Corridor or by the 'ancien passage'? In the narrative before us he says, 'I mustered courage to ascend again, *but on the left side.*' It is clear, therefore, that he took one of these two routes. Balmat himself states, in a passage which does not appear in the Dumas narrative, but which was first published by Michel Carrier, 'that by force of patience and perseverance he gained the Rochers Rouges'—that is, that he discovered the 'ancien passage.' Mr. Freshfield suggests to me that Balmat probably got to the top of the Corridor, the route supposed to have been discovered by Hawes and Fellows in 1827; and this surmise is the more probable, as when Paccard and Balmat made the first ascent in 1786, by way of the 'ancien passage,' the former claimed it as a *new route.*

There is another interesting passage in the manuscript well worth attention. My readers may remember that in the Dumas narrative Balmat states that when the attempt was about to be made which ultimately proved successful 'Dr. Paccard desired this time to accompany me,' but in the narrative before us Balmat expressly states that 'Dr. Paccard invited me to make the attempt.'

It is clear therefore, as I have always held, that the initiative was due to Paccard, quite as much if not more than to the self-seeking old guide.

Again, the manuscript states: 'We started on August 7, 1786, and did not arrive till 6.30 P.M. We remained 32 minutes on the summit'; and then Balmat adds, 'I went twice to the summit of Mont Blanc on August 8, 1786,' a statement which I have shown in the 'Annals of Mont Blanc' on the most trustworthy evidence to be untrue. Balmat in this manuscript was clearly beginning to assume the rôle he afterwards maintained, that he and he only made the first ascent.

It is well known that the Emperor Napoleon ordered an iron cross to be erected on the summit of the mountain. I am not aware that the date of this act has ever been given; the manuscript fixes July 25, 1811, and states that five men were employed for this purpose.

There are many trivial errors in the dates of the different ascents between that of Saussure and that of Wilbraham. That of Beaufoy was on August 9, not August 18, 1787. That of Dorthesen and Forneret was August 11 not August 10, 1802. Balmat's subsequent ascent with his two sons and Maria Paradis was on July 17, 1809, not 1808. That of Captain Undrell was on August 11, not August 13, 1819. The exact dates of the ascents of Clissold and Auldjo are also incorrectly given, and the date of the erection of the iron cross is twice inserted.

Again, the entry of the ascent of Rodatz in 1812 is made *after* that of Count Matzewski in 1818, and the ascents of Fellows and Hawes and of Auldjo in 1827 are made *after* that of Wilbraham in 1830. Why were these mistakes made? There is every appearance of the manuscript having been written at one time and in one ink. Clearly the entries must have been hurriedly transcribed from a notebook for a particular purpose. They must have been transcribed, too, after the year 1830, for Wilbraham's ascent is recorded as of that year.

May not these notes have been put together by Balmat for use at the memorable interview with Alexander Dumas in 1832? Anyhow this manuscript, though fragmentary and inaccurate, adds something to our knowledge of Alpine history, and I have every hope that further and more precise information on this particular portion of it may yet be obtained.

AN EXCITING GLISSADE.

BY SIR MARTIN CONWAY, PRESIDENT.

'**D**E seldsaame en noit gehorde WAL-VIS-VANGST voorgevallen by St. Anna-Land in't jaar 1682 den 7 October.' is the title of a very rare quarto pamphlet, written by one 'P. P. v. S.' and published at Leiden in 1684. There were at least two editions of it, neither of which is represented in the British Museum Library. I have long sought and only recently obtained a copy. The little volume of seventy-eight