

specimen fired at escaped. (See 'Zoologist' third series, vol. viii., p. 383.)

The following year (1884) I met the late Mr. Henry Seebohm, author of a well-known book on British Birds in Montreal, and told him I thought the St. Kilda wren was worth looking after. In the following year he sent Mr. Dixon there, who obtained the wren, and Seebohm immediately described it as a new British bird, *Troglodytes hirtensis*.

Heathcote, at the end of his book, hopes that he has deterred most people from going to St. Kilda. I am afraid his interesting volume will have exactly the opposite effect, but I do not expect his happy hunting-grounds, as he expresses it, will ever be 'invaded by a host of Sassenachs.'

My last visit to St. Kilda, in 1896, was very brief, and was made when returning from an expedition to the still more remote island of Rockall,* 170 miles further west in the Atlantic; nobody has, I believe, been able to land on this island for over half a century. I saw Donald McDonald, then looking very poorly, and believe Donald McQueen was dead, for I could not find him.

THE GROWTH OF A LEGEND ; OR, PACCARD *v.* BALMAT.†

By DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD.

It has been a matter of dispute from the beginning in what proportion the credit of the first ascent of Mont Blanc was to be shared, or divided, between the two men who took part in it. Both were born Chamoniards—Paccard, the village doctor, a man of intelligence and some scientific attainments, and Jacques Balmat, a sturdy peasant and crystal-hunter of an adventurous spirit. The story till lately current, according to which Dr. Paccard played an altogether secondary part, was first given a European currency by the famous romancer, Alexandre Dumas père. In his 'Swiss Travels' he describes at length how in 1832, anticipating the modern interviewer, he invited Balmat to supper, and over his wine induced the old man to pour out the tale of his forty-six years' old adventure.

Dr. Dübi has, in the volume before us, set out the details of an attempt made with infinite pains to investigate the existing evidence for and against this story as repeated, or embellished, by Dumas. His researches, coupled with those of a member of our Club, to whom he repeatedly acknowledges his indebtedness (Mr. Montagnier),

* See *Transactions Roy. Irish Academy*, Aug. 1897.

† *Paccard wider Balmat: oder Die Entwicklung einer Legende, ein Beitrag zur Besteigungsgeschichte des Mont Blanc.* Von Dr. HEINRICH DÜBI. Bern: A. Francko. 1913.

have added largely to this evidence. The result of their joint labours is aptly expressed in Dr. Dübi's sub-title, 'The Growth of a Legend.'

It can hardly be needful for me to repeat here the well-known tale. I have already done so once in these pages (A.J. vol. xix., pp. 341-9). We were asked to believe that it was to Balmat alone that was due the discovery, or adoption, of the route taken; the climb from the Grands Mulets up the snow-valley and across the Petit Plateau, the forcing of the 'ancien passage'; that Balmat reached the top of Mt. Blanc alone, and then returned to drag his exhausted companion up the final slope.

But how, the reader may well ask, can such a controversy be definitely solved one hundred and twenty-seven years after the event? The answer supplied by Dr. Dübi is simple and satisfactory. He has the good fortune to be able to put before us the diary, written at the time, of a disinterested eyewitness. This witness is the Baron von Gersdorf, a German traveller of repute who was at Chamonix on the day of the first ascent, watched with a telescope from the upper part of the village the climbers' progress, and made exact notes which he illustrated by diagrams of the route taken. The following is the crucial sentence: 'They started again (from the Petits Rochers Rouges) at 5.45 p.m., halted for a moment about every hundred yards, *changed occasionally the leadership* (the italics are mine), at 6.12 p.m. gained two rocks protruding from the snow, and at 6.23 p.m. were on the actual summit.' It may be well to quote the original: 'Von da' (the Petits Rochers Rouges) 'brachen sie wieder auf um 5.45, ruhten nach ungefähr 100 Schritten immer einen Augenblick aus, wechselten mit einander in Vorausgehen manchmal ab, kamen um 6.12 bei zwei durch den Schnee ausstechenden kleinen Felsen vorbei, und kamen um 6.23 auf dem höchsten Gipfel an . . . Sie verliessen den Gipfel um 6.57 und waren laufend schon in 6 minuten bei dem untern einzelnen Felsen.'

Von Gersdorf had a companion, von Meyer, and they both, at the request of Dr. Paccard's father, who was a notary at Chamonix, signed a certificate of what they had seen, which is still preserved at Chamonix. Von Gersdorf's sketches of the route taken by the climbers were handed to and used by de Saussure. Von Gersdorf's diary was found at Görlitz, where his correspondence has been preserved in a public library. The various steps by which Dr. Dübi was set upon this track are fully set out in his introductory chapter. One fortunate link was the fact that von Gersdorf was a frequent correspondent of Herr Wyttenbach of Bern, a Swiss savant whose biography Dr. Dübi has recently written.

This conclusive testimony of trustworthy and impartial witnesses ought to demolish once for all the Dumas version, to which, by his too ready acceptance of it in his work on Mont Blanc, M. Durier had given a renewed currency. It justifies all the doubts and scepticism expressed by C. E. Mathews, Mr. Gribble, and myself in recent years. The legend, promulgated by the ready pen of the

prince of storytellers, must be finally abandoned. Henceforth Paccard must share at least an equal fame with his companion.

But from what sources did the legend spring? Dr. Dübi, with unflagging industry, traces it back to its very birth. It had its first origin in the brain of a man who had, in de Saussure's own words, 'even more than myself set his heart on the conquest of Mt. Blanc,' the self-styled 'historiographer of the Alps'—the indefatigable and irrepressible Marc Theodore Bourrit. The fact that Mt. Blanc had been conquered by another, and that other, like himself, an amateur, he resented as an outrage; he regarded his too successful rival as a 'trompeur ou voleur' (Dübi, p. 87). His only solace lay in attributing all the credit to Balmat, and disparaging, as far as possible, the part played by Paccard.

The character of Bourrit offers an entertaining and somewhat perplexing study to the biographer. I tried my hand at drawing his portrait many years ago ('A.J.' vol. ix. p. 11). Attracted by his enthusiasm for the Alps, by his pathetic efforts despite frequent failures to become a climber, I was disposed to touch lightly on his lesser faults, his exuberance, his exaggerations, his naïve vanity. The full evidence of the snares into which that vanity led him was still unrevealed.

By profession a precentor in the cathedral at Geneva, by taste an artist, it was Bourrit's ambition to be regarded and treated as one of the leading explorers of the Alps. He succeeded in so far that distinguished strangers came to his studio and bought his books, and that Goethe described him as 'ein passionirter Kletterer.' He had enough sense to recognise that he could not compete with de Saussure, who was equally his superior in station, in talents, and in means; but in his special field he would brook no other rival. His treatment of Bordier, to which I referred in my article on the Buet quoted above, was more characteristic of the man than I then knew. It illustrates and explains his treatment of Dr. Paccard.

No sooner had the news of the first ascent of Mt. Blanc reached him than, true to his assumed post as 'historiographer of the Alps,' he determined not only to write about it, which was natural, but to write about it in such a way as to disparage Dr. Paccard's part in the exploit, and to injure his prospect of getting subscribers to an account of the famous adventure. To this end he prepared his now notorious letter of September 20, 1786. It was first published as a pamphlet at Geneva, and afterwards in the *Mercure de France* and other newspapers. Here he lays the foundation of the legend. This is what he told his readers: 'By 3 P.M. the climbers were in straits. The Doctor began to lose his breath, his knees grew stiff, the cold incapacitated him; his companion, better trained and harder, encouraged him. A crest came in view. Was it the summit? Balmat sprang in front, reached the top, shouted to his companion, then went back and helped him up.' Now follows this sentence, the motive

of which is only too evident : ' J'apprends déjà que M. le Médecin Paccard [*sic*] espère tirer des fruits de sa course, qu'il s'est fait annoncer à Lausanne et s'y est fait voir comme le Conquérant du Mont Blanc, dont il promet une description pour laquelle il fait déjà souscrire ; tandis que le pauvre Balmat, à qui l'on doit cette découverte, reste presque ignoré, et ignore qu'il y ait des journalistes, des journaux, et que l'on puisse par le moyen de ces trompettes littéraires obtenir du Public une sorte d'admiration.'

De Saussure, on hearing from Tairraz, the Chamonix innkeeper, the first news of the ascent, had written thanking him for announcing ' l'heureux succès de l'expédition de M. le Docteur Paccard.' His action on seeing an early copy of Bourrit's effusion was consistent with the view thus clearly expressed. He seems to have protested, and warned Bourrit he might expose himself to an inconvenient reply. Bourrit consequently added a postscript, in which he apologised to a certain extent for his reproduction of Balmat's story, and referred in a different and more appreciative tone to Dr. Paccard's promised work. An anonymous reply to Bourrit, giving Paccard's version of the ascent, and probably founded on notes communicated by him to the Editor, appeared in the *Journal de Lausanne* on February 24, 1787. This quickly (February 28) drew Bourrit, who, I regret to say, in order to confirm Balmat's story, resorted to an untruth, now brought to light : he wrote as follows : ' Balmat's story seems very natural . . . and is further confirmed by an eyewitness, M. le Baron de Gersdorf, who watched the climbers through his glasses, and this stranger was so shocked at the indifference (to use no stronger word) shown by M. Paccard to his companion that he has reprinted my letter in his own country in order to start a subscription in favour of poor Balmat.'

We know fortunately from the traveller himself what he did see through his glasses ; and Baron von Gersdorf promptly wrote to Paccard disclaiming altogether the motive assigned for his action in raising a subscription.

Paccard's reply to this fresh attack was to publish in the *Journal de Lausanne* of May 18 following two affidavits by Balmat. The first was sworn in the preceding October, in the presence of two witnesses who countersigned it ; the other was dated March 1787. In the former, Balmat not only gives credit to the doctor as the planner of the expedition and as having taken a full share of its labours ; he acknowledges also that he had been fed and paid by the doctor, and received from him, besides his wage, a present given by von Gersdorf. This document has perished. The second, which is still in existence and of which a facsimile is given by Dr. Dübi, is entirely in Balmat's own handwriting. It again attests the payments made to him and thereby contradicts Bourrit's repeated statement, alleged to be made on Balmat's authority, that the latter accompanied Paccard as a volunteer and refused an *écu de six livres* offered him as payment for his services.

An effort was subsequently made by Balmat to disparage these fatal documents ; he alleged that in the first case he had signed a blank sheet. I agree with Dr. Dübi that this tale, which was never apparently put into writing, is inconsistent with the facts ; Balmat was the reverse of a fool, and the document was written on stamped official paper and signed by Balmat and countersigned by two witnesses.

We have from two quarters—Gosse's papers (very *disjecta membra*) and the diary of Bourrit's son—an account of 'a regrettable incident' arising out of this dispute. Monday, July 10, 1787, was a wet and cold day ; Balmat and others of his family were drinking at Couteran's wine-shop near the bridge at Chamonix ; some of Paccard's relatives were there too. Words waxed high, the disputants went out intending to go to the doctor's. They met him in the street ; Balmat addressed some remark to him, the reply was a blow on the nose from the doctor's umbrella which laid Balmat on the ground.

De Saussure, who had arrived at Chamonix the same day, did his best to mend matters. Balmat was able next morning to give an account of the affair to Bourrit's son—an ingenuous youth whose diary has fallen into Mr. Montagnier's hands. Balmat is not recorded to have ever repeated his assertion as to the blank document. The conclusive evidence against it is, however, Bourrit's silence on the subject in the *Journal de Lausanne* and elsewhere. He would have jumped at such an opportunity to discredit the doctor had he had any hope of proving his case.

We are forced, then, to the conclusion that it was through Bourrit's mischievous intervention that strained relations, culminating in this petty strife, were first created between the two conquerors of Mt. Blanc. We have, further, Paccard's own statement that it was owing to the prejudice created by Bourrit's letter, not confined to Geneva, but already circulated in Germany, France, Holland, and England, that the doctor failed in the subscription for his proposed book. That it was never published may, I think, now be taken as proved. Further records indicate that Paccard at a later date proposed to incorporate the material in a larger volume, which also never saw the light.

But there still remains a puzzling inconsistency in Bourrit's conduct towards his companion. In after years we find Bourrit writing in his 'Description des Cols ou Passages des Alpes (1803)': 'Although M. Bourrit procured for Jacques Balmat recompenses from subscribers in Germany, from the King of Sardinia, and M. de Saussure, it is none the less true that Dr. Paccard should share in the glory of this Chamoniard, even if, as we have reason to believe, he was not its first cause (si même, comme nous avons des raisons de croire, il n'en a pas été la première cause).'

How is this marked change of attitude to be accounted for ? Did it arise from a tardy sense of justice ? I should like to think so, for

one cannot help feeling a tenderness for the old 'Historiographer.' But I regret to say the Gersdorf correspondence suggests quite another explanation.

In 1791 we find Bourrit behindhand in delivering coloured plates that had been already paid for. Next year Balmat wrote to von Gersdorf complaining that Bourrit was still holding back a large part of the money subscribed for him in Germany. Von Gersdorf wrote to Bourrit with polite severity, calling on him to hand over the money to Balmat. The reply to the first complaint, written for Bourrit by a primary schoolmaster, is a plea of illness and poverty. To the second and more serious one no reply has been preserved.

It is fair to state that Bourrit, in his letter to Miss Craven, written in 1787, asserts that he has paid to Balmat these seventeen louis. Bourrit writes seventeen, but the exact sum was something over sixteen. (Dübi, pp. 92 and 111.) Did he take the intention for the deed? Let us be more than generous, and assume the contrary. But, whether or not the money was duly paid, the fact that Balmat had written to von Gersdorf, complaining of Bourrit's withholding it, supplies a very sufficient reason for the latter's altered language as to his accuser.

The judgment of a contemporary is against Bourrit. Wytenbach, the Bernese savant, to whom von Gersdorf communicated the charge, writes back in terms of unmeasured harshness, alleging that 'all who know him realise Bourrit to be a conceited toad, a flighty fool, a bombastic swaggerer,' and threatening to let de Saussure, Pictet, Tollet, Jorine, and Gosse—all Geneva—know of his misappropriation, should he not forthwith deliver the prepaid plates.

I turn with relief to the kinder, and, I think, more discerning verdict pronounced by the celebrated Bonnet: 'Les Voyages aux Alpes de notre Bourrit ne sont au fond que des peintures; cet homme, chanteur de notre Cathédrale, qui a ses talents pour la musique et le dessin, n'est ni physicien, ni naturaliste, et son imagination est toujours en effervescence. Il faut néanmoins lui tenir compte de son ardeur et de son courage.' With these words let us leave 'notre Bourrit'; for by his passion for the mountains he remains one of us.

The main purpose of Dr. Dübi's book is to put before us the character and relations of these three men, Bourrit, Balmat, and Paccard. We have discussed the first; Balmat and Paccard have yet to be brought up for judgment. Dr. Dübi prints an anonymous appreciation of Balmat which he attributes to de Saussure's grandson, the late M. Henri de Saussure. In any case it reproduces very exactly what M. de Saussure told me in 1891: 'C'est uniquement l'apport d'une forte somme promise par M. H. B. de Saussure qui a fini par conduire Balmat à la cime du Mont Blanc. Il a plus qu'une fois renoncé à poursuivre son escalade parce qu'il se voyait suivre par d'autres guides. Toujours âpre au gain, il redoutait avant tout d'avoir à partager avec d'autres non l'honneur, mais l'argent. On retrouve dans Balmat le type le plus accentué du Savoyard à

l'esprit étroitement intéressé. S'il a fini par s'associer au Dr. Paccard c'est que celui-ci ne réclamait rien pour sa part.'

Last we come to Dr. Paccard. Everything we know of him—unless we except that fracas in the street—is to his credit. His scientific attainments were undoubtedly insignificant compared with those of a Bonnet or a de Saussure. Yet he was a member of the Academy of Turin, he contributed articles to a scientific periodical published in Paris, he corresponded with de Saussure about his barometrical observations. He is described by a visitor to Chamonix in 1788 in the following terms: 'We also visited Dr. Paccard, who gave us a very plain and modest account of his ascent of Mt. Blanc, for which bold undertaking he does not seem to assume to himself any particular merit, but asserts that anyone with like physical powers might have performed the task equally well. He is at present employed in a work upon the glaciers which will contain the results of many years' examination into their origin: from an intelligent man who lives at their very foot and can observe them at every season we may reasonably be led to expect something satisfactory relative to so important and curious a subject.' Paccard's diary, now in the possession of the Club, shows him to have been a competent botanist.

I have cited M. Henri de Saussure as a witness in Balmat's case. I may refer to his testimony with regard to Paccard, equally emphatic, which may be read in my paper ('A.J.' vol. xix. p. 347). It appears to me conclusive. The traditions directly handed down in the de Saussure family seem the best of all evidence on the matters in question.

Apart from its main purpose the curious reader may find much varied matter in Dr. Dübi's entertaining volume. There are long strings of rhymes (I will not call them poems) addressed to the climbers. One of the rhymes celebrates de Saussure; another depreciates him in order to extol Balmat and Paccard. Their authors, after a fashion not yet extinct, bandy about personal names, and endeavour, fortunately in vain, to affix them to the great mountain.

'Mortels, ne courez pas après un vain renom,
L'injustice et l'erreur maîtrisent la Nature,
Vespuce à l'Amérique a su donner son nom,
Et le Mont Paccard est nommé le Mont Saussure.'

Americans, take warning, and at any rate confine yourselves to your own continent and your own citizens! Personal nomenclature, applied to mountains, is a snare resented by none more than by those who have been among its unwilling victims.

With regard to the relative and at first sight contradictory claims of Paccard and Balmat to the *discovery* of the route taken in the ascents of Mont Blanc prior to the coming into use of the Corridor and Mur de la Côte, I find nothing in the documents collected by Herr Dübi to modify the conclusion I came to in my previous article

(‘A.J.’ vol. xix.)—to which I would again refer readers. For a summary of the parts played by Paccard and Balmat respectively in the various explorations and attempts made previous to the successful ascent they must turn to Dr. Dübi’s volume, pp. 43–4. It shows that Paccard came earliest into the field and was the more enterprising of the two.

It may be convenient if I take this occasion to supply here, where it may catch the eyes of those who are interested in matters relating to Mont Blanc and its early ascents, a correction of a very surprising statement contained in ‘The Diary of Frances Lady Shelley,’ published last year. It is to the effect that Sir John Shelley, the lady’s husband, *climbed Mont Blanc with de Saussure.* Mr. Edgcumbe, the editor, has been good enough to furnish me with the original sentence in his grandmother’s Diary, which he has paraphrased in his text. It runs as follows :

‘In 1787 he (Sir J. Shelley) passed through Paris on his way to a private tutor at Geneva, the celebrated Professor Pictet, the friend of de Saussure. Here . . . he gained practical knowledge, ascending to the Dome of Mont Blanc with de Saussure.’

In a letter Mr. Edgcumbe adds : ‘Sir John was only seventeen years of age at the time of de Saussure’s ascent and his name was probably not even known to those who wrote an official account of that ascent. I have no doubt in my mind of the truth of Lady Shelley’s statement.’

He repeats the assertion in a ‘sixth imprint,’ and thereby compels me to point out its incredible character. As all Alpine climbers know, De Saussure’s ascent of Mt. Blanc has been described in very minute detail both by himself and others, and the presence in his party of an English lad could not possibly have passed unrecorded ; nor is there any entry in the annals of Mt. Blanc of the 18th century that can be made to support the statement that Sir John Shelley ever climbed the mountain. It seems to me obvious that Lady Shelley must have put down in her Diary some confused recollection of conversations as to her husband’s early years and exploits. Sir John, between 1787 and 1790, while Pictet’s pupil, was probably among the visitors to Chamonix. Possibly some reference to him, or to an excursion of which he may have spoken afterwards, may turn up in the Pictet papers ; but there was no successful ascent of Mt. Blanc between 1788 and 1802. According to Ebel’s ‘Voyageur en Suisse’ (vol. iii. article ‘Mont Blanc’) four Englishmen, however, attempted an ascent in 1792. They got no farther than the Montagne de la Côte—the ridge dividing the Bossons and Taconnay Glaciers—owing to a fall of rocks which more or less seriously injured two members of the party and some of their guides. Sir J. Shelley, however, was not of this party, for he returned to England in 1790, a date fixed by his having been present at the famous Federation in the Champ de Mars on his way home.