

THE EARLY ATTEMPTS ON MONT BLANC DE COURMAYEUR FROM THE INNOMINATA BASIN

(*Continued.*)

6. KENNEDY AND MARSHALL, 1873 (? PÉTERET ROUTE PROJECT)

IN his famous account of the first crossing of the Col des Hirondelles on July 14, 1873, by Gabriel Loppé, T. S. Kennedy, J. A. Garth Marshall and himself, Leslie Stephen tells us that the party spent the following day 'lounging about the lovely Courmayeur meadows . . . and speculating on the possibility of making a direct escalade of Mont Blanc by the southern buttress.'³⁵

The meadows were probably those through which runs a small stream near the ruined bathing establishment in the jaws of the valley between Mont Chétif and Mont de la Saxe. Little of the Innominata face is to be seen in any open view from near Courmayeur. What holds the eye is the great Péteret ridge, which rises abruptly from the valley to the Aiguille Noire de Péteret, ascends thence to the Aiguille Blanche, and finally soars up to its magnificent culmination in Mont Blanc de Courmayeur. Leslie Stephen alludes either to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur itself or to the whole Péteret ridge where he writes of the 'southern buttress' of Mont Blanc. Both he and Kennedy must at least have heard of Birkbeck's attempt in 1864 (Kennedy and Birkbeck were to have climbed together in the following season), and they had almost certainly heard in Courmayeur of Durazzo's latest attempt, so that it is likely enough that some of their present speculations concerned the Innominata face, which Kennedy must have examined and discarded in 1872 when he decided to attempt the Brouillard arête from the Miage side. But the Innominata face would be hidden from them, and even if Leslie Stephen's 'southern buttress' is not the Péteret ridge itself, that ridge must have forced itself into their speculations.

The speculations in any case concerned the problem of a new route to Mont Blanc from Courmayeur, and they were to have a decisive effect on the history of the Innominata face, because a direct connexion between them and ultimate success may be traced, the links being Kennedy—Middlemore—Eccles. The discussions also have interest and importance in another direction. The pioneering phase of Alpine climbing had been characterised by the conquests of the great outstanding peaks and by the discoveries of the great climbers' passes. Of the members of the present party, Leslie Stephen, one of the great

³⁵ *A. J.* 6. 363.

pioneers,³⁶ had himself played a notable part in that phase with such conquests (amongst many others) as the Bietschhorn and Rimpfischhorn in 1859, the Alphubel and Oberaarhorn in 1860, the Schreckhorn in 1861, Monte della Disgrazia in 1862, and the Zinal Rothorn in 1864, and with such passes as the Eigerjoch in 1859, the Jungfrauoch in 1862, and the Col des Hirondelles, now newly added to many others. A second phase of climbing (but such phases overlap and the distinctions are a little artificial) was characterised by the first ascents from other valleys or directions of peaks already conquered, as Leslie Stephen himself had completed the St. Gervais route to Mont Blanc over the Aiguille and Dôme du Goûter and the Bosses arête in 1861, and had reached the Jungfrau from the Rottal in 1864. In a third phase, now beginning to dawn, novelty was chiefly to be sought by the conquests of low but difficult peaks such as the Grépon (on which Leslie Stephen himself was just about to make the first known attempt) and by the discovery of alternative (and usually difficult) ways to peaks from valleys or glacier basins from which they had already been attained. In so far as the Italian flanks of Mont Blanc are concerned the search for a 'generally practicable' route from Courmayeur (to use Moore's term) had been brought to a successful conclusion by Kennedy's own ascent of the Miage face in the previous year. Nevertheless the present party was now discussing new alternatives which would obviously be of greater, and perhaps of very much greater difficulty than the route of 1872. In other words, what was being sought in the Courmayeur meadows was climbing adventure for its own sake—the discovery of new routes as such rather than the conquest of a summit or its attainment from a new valley—and this occasion must have been one of the early appearances of that new attitude. With such men as Leslie Stephen and Kennedy in the party it is not surprising that adventure rather than conquest was a conscious aim. Kennedy's own climbing career gives ample proof of the search for adventure.

Kennedy, born in the Vorarlberg in 1841, must have acquired his interest in mountains from early contact, but we first hear of him in 1860 when, as a lad of nineteen, he attempted the as yet unconquered Lyskamm and also made what may have been the first attempt to climb the Aiguille Verte.³⁷ In 1862, after a careful consideration of the problem which suggests considerable mountaineering knowledge, he decided that winter conditions on the Matterhorn offered the best

³⁶ Mountaineers of the pioneering generation (with their years of birth) mentioned in this article are Charles Hudson (1828), Leslie Stephen (1832), and F. F. Tuckett (1834). T. S. Kennedy himself was one of the greatest climbers of the 'second generation,' and it is of interest that a period of less than 30 months covered the dates of birth of Edward Whymper (1840), T. S. Kennedy (1841), A. W. Moore (1841), and John Birkbeck, junior (1842). Garth Marshall gave promise of becoming one of the prominent members of a 'third generation,' to which, because of the relatively late commencements of their climbing careers, James Eccles (1838) and Thomas Middlemore (1842) may be said to belong.

³⁷ See Mumm: *A.C. Register*, 1. 175, from which, and other sources, the following has been derived.

chance for its conquest and made his extraordinary attempt by the Zermatt arête in *January*. In the summer of that same year he conquered the Dent Blanche after a first unsuccessful attempt. In 1865 he was to have been a member of Hudson's party for the Matterhorn by the Zermatt arête, but was forced to return home after taking part, however, in the first ascent of the Moine arête of the Aiguille Verte a few days after Whymper's actual conquest of the peak. In 1867 a topographical error in an attempt to climb the Aiguille de Blaitière (? Aiguille du Plan) took his party to another unclimbed point near the Aiguille du Midi. In 1872 he made his ascent of Mont Blanc by the Miage face, as we have seen, and thereafter conquered the Aiguille de Leschaux with Garth Marshall (then in his first season of climbing) in his party. To the events of 1873 we shall return immediately. In 1874, after an attempt upon the unclimbed Grépon, Kennedy made the attempt on the Innominata face which will be described later on. Waiting for good weather in which he might make another attempt, he next made a new ascent of the Aiguilles Rouges d'Arolla, but the weather did not relent. Later in his climbing career (1883) he made one of the pioneer mountaineering visits to the Himalaya, but an attack of malaria unfortunately frustrated his efforts. Such are only a few of the achievements in a climbing record of which our knowledge is unfortunately scanty, because Kennedy himself kept no notes of his many expeditions.

Kennedy was again joined by Marshall in 1873. One of the earliest of their expeditions was an attempt on the Aiguille du Petit Dru on July 4, and we next know that on July 10 (Marshall being prevented by illness) Kennedy made the first ascent of the Aiguille de Blaitière (N. point). They then joined forces with Gabriel Loppé and Leslie Stephen, made a close examination of the French flank of the Col des Hirondelles (Kennedy and Marshall had inspected the other side of the pass in 1872), and next crossed it on July 14, so reaching Courmayeur. Returning over the Col du Géant on July 19, they reached Zermatt by a series of passes with ascents on the way, one of the latter being that of the Aiguille de la Tsa by a novel route. They concluded their climbing with an ascent of the Jungfrau from the Kleine Scheidegg on July 28. The days between July 15 (that of the speculations) and July 19 were spent at Courmayeur, and they concern us here.

Loppé and Leslie Stephen returned to Chamonix over the Col du Géant on July 16, the day after the discussions. Kennedy and Marshall, having necessarily reached Courmayeur lightly laden over the Col des Hirondelles, would in ordinary circumstances also have returned at once, but something seems to have kept them away from Chamonix until July 19. After these interesting speculations it is easy enough to guess what the attraction may have been, and there is some evidence which suggests that the intervening days were devoted to closer examinations of the Péteret ridge.

In the certificate which he gave to Ulrich Almer on July 28,³⁸

³⁸ In Ulrich Almer's Guide's Book, shown to me by him.

Marshall includes amongst their expeditions 'the ascent of the lower peak of the Peteret.' At that time Mieulet's map of the range of Mont Blanc was the most accurate and detailed for the Italian flanks of the chain, and it was in general use amongst climbers.³⁹ Mieulet triangulated and named the Mont Rouge (de Péteret), but in place of the Aiguille Noire and Mont Noir he gave two points under the single name 'Aiguille de Peuteret,' by which the Aiguille Noire was then commonly known. The lesser of these points (2948 m.) corresponds in position and elevation with the present Mont Noir (2916 m.), and Marshall's 'lower point of the Peteret' accurately describes Mont Noir, of which this was therefore the first ascent. The expedition itself was probably made on July 16 or 17, and in any case it can only have been made on one of these days between July 16 and 19. Its obvious object was to make a close examination of the Aiguille Noire de Péteret, and no great stretch of the imagination is needed to see a connexion between this expedition and the speculations of July 15.

We know from Moore's Journal⁴⁰ that he found Kennedy and Utterson-Kelso (soon to enter this history) at Courmayeur when he arrived there on July 17 late in the afternoon. Moore persuaded the latter to join him for an ascent of the Grandes Jorasses on the following day, and the wording seems to suggest that Kennedy refused a similar invitation, which would certainly be given. Kennedy and Marshall (whom Moore does not mention) cannot have been delaying their return to Chamonix without good cause, and if that cause were not the Grandes Jorasses, it must have been something even more attractive. It is significant that Moore, who usually describes his friends' movements, makes no further mention of Kennedy's, although Moore alludes to Kennedy's name on July 19 in connexion with the route to Mont Blanc up the Miage face which he himself intended to repeat. It is probable therefore that Kennedy and Marshall left Courmayeur on July 18 whilst Moore was on the Grandes Jorasses. That day was one of doubtful weather, the upper part of the mountain being in cloud from about midday onwards. The weather broke at night, when rain fell in Courmayeur and snow must have fallen at higher altitudes. July 19 was 'altogether a less favourable day for mountaineering' than July 18, and Girdlestone lost himself in dense mist on the Rutor that day.

If Kennedy and Marshall left Courmayeur on July 18, they certainly did not cross the Col du Géant until July 19, and in this case must have slept at Mont Fréty for the intervening night. There was as

³⁹ It is significant in this connexion that Moore (*A. J.* 5. 413) refers to the pass subsequently crossed by Eccles in 1870 merely as the 'col dit infranchissable' without mention of Mieulet's map, on which alone that topographical note (it was not a name) occurs. This omission certainly points to the fact that the map was in such general use that reference to it was unnecessary.

⁴⁰ Moore's private *Journal*, in the possession of the Club. The relevant passage has been printed in Moore's *The Alps in 1864*, E. H. Stevens' edition, 1939, vol. 2, p. 493. For the weather during the days in question, see pp. 493-9, 502.

yet no hut on the Col du Géant itself (the first hut was opened in 1875), and many travellers slept at Mont Fréty before crossing the pass. Kennedy and Marshall had engaged Séraphin Henry, one of the best guides then in Courmayeur, in addition to Johann Fischer and Ulrich Almer, and they paid him off on the col itself, giving him the following joint certificate dated there on July 19: 'H. Seraphin accompanied us *towards* the Brenva glacier & then up the Col du Géant' (my italics).⁴¹ The wording of this certificate and the engagement of Séraphin Henry in addition to their own great guides are alike peculiar. Kennedy was, as we have seen, in the habit of engaging Courmayeur guides to act as porters to high bivouacs and also no doubt in part for their local knowledge. Travelling lightly as they were, Kennedy and Marshall can have had no need for Séraphin Henry's service in either capacity for the familiar passage of the Col du Géant and a mere valley détour towards the Brenva Glacier would not be mentioned in a certificate to a guide. The way up on to the Brenva Glacier by the 'Brèche de la Brenva'⁴² is, however, not easy to find, and local knowledge is there very useful.

The party probably left Courmayeur on July 18 with the intention of paying a visit to the Brenva Glacier. Their object can scarcely have been a repetition of the old Brenva route, because in that case they would certainly have consulted Moore himself, and he would as certainly have mentioned the fact. In view of the recent discussions, there can be little doubt that their objective was the examination, or even the trial, of a route to Mont Blanc by the Péteret ridge, which would be gained from the glacier either in the vicinity of the Col de Péteret (then perhaps practicable although not so now) or up the flank of the Aiguille Blanche. They may have gone with porters for a bivouac from which an attempt was to be made, or their intention may have been merely to make a close examination, but in either case the certificate suggests that they reached the 'Brenva brèche.' The wording does not exclude an ascent thereafter at the true left edge of the glacier, because the latter is scarcely entered upon for some distance higher up. As we have however seen, the weather must have been unfavourable for an examination on July 18 and too uncertain for an attempt on July 19 from a bivouac on the Brenva Glacier, if that were the intention of the party. Either project must have been abandoned and they probably traversed to Mont Fréty from the vicinity of the 'Brenva brèche,' slept there that night, and crossed the Col du Géant next day.

Kennedy wrote an appreciation of his great guide, Johann Fischer, fourteen years later.⁴³ In recounting the expeditions which they made

⁴¹ Séraphin Henry's Guide's Book, now in Courmayeur.

⁴² The 'Brèche de la Brenva' is the 'pass,' high above the valley, by which the true left edge of the glacier is reached from the E. above its final ice fall. The way crosses the lowermost part of the ridge which descends S.E. from the Aig. de la Brenva.

⁴³ In *Pioneers of the Alps* (Cunningham and Abney), 1887, p. 267.

together, Kennedy states that in 1874: 'We made other excursions up the Brenva glacier, and up a point of the great Aiguille de Peuteret ridge from Courmayeur.' It has been said above that Kennedy kept no personal record of his expeditions, and Marshall's contemporary entry clearly proves that at least the Mont Noir expedition took place in 1873. The Brenva Glacier expedition may well refer to one in 1873 also, when Kennedy and Marshall may have gone some distance up the glacier after leaving Séraphin Henry behind. But if views were then denied, as seems to have been likely, Kennedy probably paid another visit to that glacier for the same purpose in 1874 before turning to the Innominata face, as he did. What we know of Kennedy's movements in the latter year leaves gaps in which such a second visit might have been made, and if it were made in fact, Kennedy's later memory may have associated the Mont Noir excursion with the second and more extensive visit to the glacier.

Conjecture enters largely into this reconstruction of the events of 1873, but discussions of far-reaching importance in this history did take place on July 15, Kennedy and Marshall did make the first ascent of Mont Noir de Péteret shortly thereafter and also did make at least a détour towards the Brenva Glacier. If these two may have had projects on the Péteret ridge (and who can doubt it?) they did give them up for the time being when they returned to Chamonix on July 19. Each of them was to make an attempt to find a new route to Mont Blanc in the following season, but from the Innominata basin. In the meanwhile, the weather improved after Kennedy and Marshall crossed the Col du Géant, and Girdlestone and Utterson-Kelso were to make an attempt on the Innominata face within forty-eight hours. The latter, as we have seen, was in Courmayeur with Kennedy on July 17, and perhaps this attempt owed something at second hand to the speculations on the Courmayeur meadows.

7. GIRDLESTONE AND UTTERSON-KELSO, 1873 (INNOMINATA ROUTE)

A serious attempt to climb Mont Blanc de Courmayeur from the Innominata basin was made by A. G. Girdlestone and W. E. Utterson-Kelso two days after Kennedy and Marshall crossed the Col du Géant in 1873, but no details of this expedition have yet been published. The only contemporary reference is contained in the minutes of a meeting of the Alpine Club, at which Moore merely mentioned the fact and added that the climbers (no guides being named) 'were at noon only at the foot of the rocks at the head of the Glacier du Brouillard.'⁴⁴ Durier, in an allusion, mentions Julien Grange as taking part, and he therefore must have had other sources of information.⁴⁵ When parts of Moore's private Journal for 1873 were published in 1902, additional information was given concerning the

⁴⁴ *A. J.* 6. 384.

⁴⁵ Durier: *Le Mont Blanc* [ref. from 3rd edit. 1881, p. 316].

circumstances of the attempt, but nothing was added to the little known of its detail.⁴⁶ Grange's own narrative, when it first saw the light of day in 1923, added only that 'un point très élevé du Brouillard' was reached, and that the party retired because the hour of day was too late.⁴⁷ Girdlestone, however, kept a continuous climbing Journal in the form of letters to his mother, and the generous gift of these to the Club by his nephew, Mr. G. R. Girdlestone, enables us now to reconstruct the story.

When Moore found Kennedy and Utterson-Kelso at Courmayeur on July 17, the latter was there to meet Girdlestone, who, however, did not arrive that day. Utterson-Kelso, who can scarcely have failed to discuss the current topic with Kennedy and Marshall, now joined Moore for the ascent of the Grandes Jorasses, it being significant that Julien Grange accompanied the party as far as the breakfast place. Returning late that same evening to Courmayeur, Utterson-Kelso there found Girdlestone, but rested in the village on July 19 whilst Girdlestone climbed La Vierge of the Rutor in mist. With regard to Sunday, July 20, Girdlestone records little more than that they enjoyed '2 hearty sermons,' but Moore's Journal is more communicative. He tells us that Julien Grange succeeded in 'talking over' Girdlestone and Utterson-Kelso into making an attempt from the Innominata basin, Grange seeming to be 'quite clear as to the way he would go to work.' Moore himself, however, was too sceptical to join in the adventure, or to give up the project of climbing Mont Blanc direct from Courmayeur by Kennedy's new route which he and G. E. Foster had fixed for the morrow. As Girdlestone wrote to his mother: 'Everyone had pronounced that our way up the precipices [the description is significant] would be impracticable, but the head guide was very anxious to try it.'⁴⁸

The decision to make that attempt whilst Moore repeated Kennedy's route was therefore decided that Sunday, and it too may have been influenced by the discussion of such questions which had taken place five days before. Utterson-Kelso, stirred by the problem transmitted to him by Kennedy (as we may suppose), certainly had had at least an opportunity of discussing it with Grange on the two preceding days, and, if so, Grange would certainly have spoken for his own route 'up the precipices' of the Innominata face. Julien Grange had evidently given fresh thought to the problem since 1872. His plan, however, was still to try to conquer the face direct from Courmayeur and in the one day, because so much is evident from the arrangement between Moore's party and this, that whichever first reached Mont Blanc should leave an indication for the other—and Moore's plan (which succeeded) was to pass from Courmayeur to Chamonix over Mont Blanc within

⁴⁶ Moore: *The Alps in 1864*, A. B. W. Kennedy's 1st published edition, 1902. [Stevens' edit., 1939, vol. 2, pp. 503, 504, 509.]

⁴⁷ *Augusta Praetoria*, 5. 176 (180).

⁴⁸ This and the following quotations are from Girdlestone's letters, now in the possession of the Club.

the twenty-four hours. But Grange had profited by the mistakes of the 1872 expedition, and now planned to skirt the base of Punta Innominata.

The two parties left Courmayeur at 12.15 A.M. on July 21 and parted company about 3 A.M. not far from the point at which the present track begins its rise towards the Gamba hut. Girdlestone, who does not name them, says that they had two guides in all (Moore must be mistaken when he writes of three), and the second man was Séraphin Henry, as is shown by the certificate which Utterson-Kelso wrote in his Guide's Book, and may here be quoted: 'Henry Seraphin accompanied Mr. Girdlestone & myself as second guide the 21 ult^o, in an attempt on Mont Blanc by the "Mont Blanc de Courmayeur." He shewed himself on that occasion a very fair cragsman, descending the last on the rope, with a knapsack on his back.' ⁴⁹

From this point onwards we have Girdlestone's description, which is brief. They met a herd of 21 chamois, then: 'We had steep rocks [below the Gamba alp?] & ice [on the lower reaches of the Brouillard Glacier?], & as the sun rose the snow-covered glacier above became very laborious for we sank up to & some times above the knees at each step [it should be remembered that fresh snow had fallen about 48 hours before]. The last piece of glacier was a narrow steep ridge cut across by deep chasms & with a precipice on each side, the snow [being] in quite a dangerous state of insecurity [this description can refer only to the Col du Fresnay; Girdlestone elsewhere uses similar descriptions for crests or cols directly connected by snow slopes with the glacier beneath]. We now reached the base of the first rocks, in part great blocks imbedded in snow, in part solid rock [an accurate description of the lower part of Pic Eccles a little above the Col du Fresnay]. After an hour on this, our progress was obviously such that we should not reach the summit till towards sunset & there should be in a most awkward fix. Stones too were detached by the sun's heat loosening their icy setting. So after a council of war we gave up further progress, although we had proved that the route was practicable if only we had instead of starting from Courmayeur have [*sic*] slept out high up the evening before making the ascent. Our descent required much more care than the ascent & it was 10 P.M. before we regained Courmayeur.'

They rested next day, crossed the Col du Géant on July 23 without guides to Chamonix, where they spent a pleasant evening with Leslie Stephen and Adams-Reilly. We may imagine what they talked about.

There are no questions at issue in the case of this fine expedition. They ascended the Brouillard Glacier to the Col du Fresnay, gained the crest of the col, and then continued up towards Pic Eccles, but without reaching the latter and without going near Punta Innominata on the way—because either would certainly have been mentioned by Girdlestone. Pic Eccles (about 4050 m.) rises about 1400 ft. above the Col du Fresnay (about 3600 m.), and it may be attained from near

⁴⁹ In Courmayeur: Grange's Guide's Book seems to have disappeared.

the col in about one and a half hours under conditions probably similar to those of 1873. The present party must be assumed to have reached a point at least half way up from the col, or an altitude of at least 3815 m. This elevation is about 330 ft. higher than Punta Innominata, and this confirms what the Abbé Henry (who had obtained first-hand information from Grange himself) wrote to me, that the point reached in 1873 was higher than that won in 1870. That this present attempt was directed towards the Innominata face itself there can be no doubt, and the detail about the stonefalls rings true. It was Julien Grange's last effort, and Durier may be correct in saying that Grange now finally relinquished his great ambition.⁵⁰

8. KENNEDY AND MIDDLEMORE, 1874 (PÉTERET ROUTE)

Kennedy made his actual attempt to solve the great problem in 1874, selecting a route from the Innominata basin for this purpose and now joining forces with Middlemore, Marshall coming to the Alps later in the season and taking Johann Fischer's services over from Kennedy.

Thomas Middlemore, although only a year younger than Kennedy, did not commence his climbing until about 1869, but then crowded the succeeding seasons with an unusual number of first-class expeditions.⁵¹ In 1873 he had begun to break new ground with the first traverse of the Aletschjoch and the first ascent of the Schallihorn (during a traverse of the Moming Pass), whilst he also made an attempt on the Grépon with Leslie Stephen. In the following year he made an attempt on the Aiguille Verte, then the attempt on Mont Blanc here to be described, and also the first passage of the Col des Grandes Jorasses. In 1875 he made an attempt on La Meije, what is accepted as being the first ascent of the Aiguille d'Entrèves, an attempt with Lord Wentworth on the Aiguille Verte by the Argentière face, and a nearly successful attempt to conquer the S.E. arête of the Finsteraarhorn. In 1876 he succeeded in climbing the Aiguille Verte from the Argentière Glacier (it was his first expedition that season!), and made the first ascents of Les Courtes (also from the Argentière Glacier) and of the highest point of Les Droites, as well as the first ascent of Pizzo Bianco (by the Biancograt). Middlemore was of the same adventurous stamp as Kennedy, and his attitude is indicated by a few characteristic words in the certificate which he wrote for Laurent Lanier in 1871: amongst other good qualities, that guide 'is most wishful to "find sport".'⁵²

In so far as 1874 is concerned, we first find Kennedy and Middlemore in Chamonix on July 6, and next meet them, after a passage of the Col du Géant, as they are going up on July 14 for their attempt on Mont Blanc. They had each of them climbed for about a week before July 6, and as their respective attempts on the Grépon and the Aiguille Verte were not made in company, it is possible (but by no means certain) that they were made before that date. The passage of the

⁵⁰ Durier: *Le Mont Blanc*, 3rd edition, 1881, p. 396.

⁵¹ See Mumm: *A.C. Register*, vol. 2, p. 237, and *A.J.* 35. 271.

⁵² Lanier's Guide's Book is in the possession of the Club.

Col du Géant was made on a clear day (rare that season), and we have suggested before that Kennedy, now with Middlemore, may have paid a visit to the Brenva Glacier, it being perhaps significant in this connexion that Middlemore bivouacked on the glacier in the following year. What is certain, however, is that Kennedy made a careful inspection of the Innominata face before the attempt, to which he went with carefully laid plans and a clear-cut line in view, as he had gone in 1872 to the Miage face. Such an inspection would probably be made from a point opposite the basin on the S. bounding ridge of Val Veni, and its date would be a day or two before July 14.

That the line of attack was carefully decided beforehand is evident from Kennedy's account of the attempt, which clearly describes the projected route⁵³: 'According to our previous plans,' the project was to reach 'the top of the ridge' (that is, Pic Eccles), then to 'descend slightly upon the head basin of the Fresnay Glacier' (that is, on to the upper shelf of the glacier, which connects Col Eccles with the Col de Péteret above the great upper icefall), and to ascend by rocks to Mont Blanc de Courmayeur, from a point on the shelf considerably short of the Col de Péteret. This description was written nearly three years before Eccles' successful ascent, but it gives the line by which that ascent was to be effected, save that the present party would have gone up by the rocks to the left (facing) of the couloir actually ascended by Eccles. In addition to this clear description, it may be noted that Kennedy wrote of the expedition at the time in Johann Fischer's Guide's Book that it was 'an attempt to ascend Mont Blanc from the head of the Fresnay Glacier'⁵⁴ and that he later used nearly the same words again.⁵⁵ This must be noted because J. P. Farrar, admittedly a great authority, subsequently suggested that the attempt may have been proposed to take the way by Col Emile Rey and the Brouillard arête.⁵⁶

Grange's idea that an ascent might be made from valley to summit in a single day and with time in hand for descent to a safe level was not inherently impossible, because the summit might certainly be reached under good conditions in about fourteen hours of actual movement from the floor of the valley (and perhaps in less time by Eccles' route). But such a time presupposes a known route and no abortive explorations, for which any party must be prepared when trying to make a new ascent of this standard. Kennedy accordingly resolved to make the attempt from a high bivouac, and his wise example was to be followed by all subsequent parties.

Kennedy and Middlemore left Courmayeur on July 14 with Johann Fischer, Hans Jaun, and two Courmayeur men, the latter being taken as porters as far as the high bivouac in the Innominata basin for which

⁵³ *A. J.* 7. 110.

⁵⁴ Quoted from Montagnier's transcript in the possession of the Club.

⁵⁵ In *Pioneers of the Alps* (Cunningham and Abney), 1887, p. 266.

⁵⁶ *A. J.* 33. 8; 25. 273. Ulrich Almer was *not* one of the guides, and the party bivouacked *by plan*.

they were making. They entered that basin to the W. of the Aiguille du Châtelet, and eventually made their bivouac at an elevation of 12,000 ft. The place may be identified with certainty. They had ascended by the Brouillard Glacier and had reached 'a point not far from its head' when, 'just at nightfall,' they turned 'to the right to gain the rocks above on our right.' Eccles tells us that in 1875, when making for Col Emile Rey, he came to this same place and then went to the left, next descending slightly.⁵⁷ This double description corresponds accurately with a small snow shelf or plateau which hangs on the Brouillard side of the base of Pic Eccles about fifteen minutes above the level of the Col du Fresnay (11,812 ft.) and on which what are usually the soundest ways to Col Emile Rey and Pic Eccles part company. A short snow slope leads up from this shelf to the S.E. arête of Pic Eccles, scattered rocks and possible bivouac places being next met a little above this level. The present party made the bivouac 'a couple of yards below the summit of the ridge,' by which Kennedy must mean its 'crest' (he uses 'end' of the ridge for Pic Eccles itself), at an estimated elevation of about 12,000 ft. The party therefore bivouacked on the S.E. ridge of Pic Eccles above the Col du Fresnay and perhaps a little below the highest point reached by Girdlestone and Utterson-Kelso in 1873. The former's description of the rock formations (quoted before⁵⁸) is in accord with the probable site of Kennedy's bivouac.

The party had reached the shelf or plateau above the Col du Fresnay by going up the extreme N.E. (true left) edge of the Brouillard Glacier and along the foot of the flanks of Punta Innominata, once halting for 15 minutes on the rocks at the lower end of one of the ribs of the latter. Kennedy's description for the lower part of the glacier is however a little difficult to follow, but they possibly crossed part of the lower end of the S. arête of Punta Innominata (as Eccles subsequently did), and they must have done so if Kennedy is correct in identifying the place where they 'dined' with the site of Marshall's later bivouac. The only remaining difficulty is presented by the long time occupied in the ascent of the glacier and the late hour of arrival at the bivouac, because under moderate conditions the 'shelf' near the Col du Fresnay should be reached in about three hours or even less from the Gamba alp. In this connexion, however, the fact that they 'dined' at Marshall's bivouac suggests a late hour (say 2 P.M.) for the commencement of serious work on the glacier. In addition, the party, accompanied by porters and laden for a high bivouac, must necessarily have gone slowly, whilst the conditions on the glacier must have been very bad indeed. July 1874 was a month of continuously bad weather, and Middlemore wrote in his certificate to Hans Jaun (he does not mention this present expedition): 'We have not had one quite clear day, and with the exception of a day spent in passing the Géant, uniformly bad weather for each expedition.'⁵⁹ From Kennedy's

⁵⁷ *A. J.* 8. 410.

⁵⁸ See p. 53.

⁵⁹ Jaun's Guide's Book, in the possession of the Club.

account it is evident that steps had to be cut the whole way up the glacier in ice or in snow, the latter being soft and incoherent, whilst rain was actually falling during the upper part of the ascent.

Kennedy merely adds that they descended next morning 'being prevented by bad weather from going farther,' but that does not give the whole story. The night was one of bad weather and new snow was lying next morning, the bivouac also being in cloud—so we are told by Andreas Fischer (Johann's son), who would hear the details from Hans Jaun.⁶⁰ In spite of such conditions, the party nevertheless went forward next morning on separate ropes, Kennedy with Johann Fischer leading. A thunderstorm broke on them, and it was the cause of the second party getting into difficulties, so that the attempt had to be abandoned. But Kennedy believed that, save for this contretemps, he and Fischer would have won through. At the time, he wrote in Fischer's Guide's Book: 'This latter attempt [that here described] would have succeeded had not the weather compelled him to go back to extricate our companions from a somewhat dangerous position.' Kennedy alluded to the thunderstorm as the cause of their retreat at a later date,⁶¹ and he always kept to the opinion that he and Fischer might have succeeded. There can in fact be little doubt that the party would have solved the problem in 1874 had the conditions been favourable.

We have no indication of the highest point reached on this occasion. Kennedy's knowledge, despite the mist, that an actual descent is required to reach the upper shelf of the Fresnay Glacier from the region of Pic Eccles (really from Col Eccles) suggests that if they did not attain Pic Eccles itself, they may have come fairly close to its summit. Although we do not know the circumstances of the thunderstorm, it is not very easy to see where such an event could bring a party into difficulties save near the top of Pic Eccles or on the steep descent from Col Eccles to the Fresnay Glacier. In the first case, Fischer must have gone down from near the summit, and in the second case he must have gone back along the upper shelf of the glacier. In the latter case, it is difficult to believe that Kennedy would not have mentioned the fact that the upper Fresnay shelf was won before the retreat commenced. A conservative conclusion is that a point not far short of the summit of Pic Eccles was reached, if not the summit itself.

One sentence in Kennedy's account is curious. During the ascent to the bivouac there had been serious stonefalls from Punta Innominata across their track up the Brouillard Glacier. Fischer said: 'Next time we come here we will sleep lower down' and (apparently) ascend by the crest of Punta Innominata.⁶² Andreas Fischer described the

⁶⁰ A. Fischer: *Hochgebirgswanderungen*, 1924, p. 111.

⁶¹ In *Pioneers of the Alps* (Cunningham and Abney), 1887, p. 267.

⁶² So, in company with Andreas Fischer, I read Kennedy's reference to a 'chamois passage.' The chamois when seen must have been on the S.E. arête of Punta Innominata, but the context of the later reference reads as if the 'passage' were to be found up Pic Eccles—an unnecessary place and useless for their purpose.

alternative way in this sense, but added that Johann Fischer also suggested that they might ascend more in the middle of the Brouillard Glacier.⁶³ Johann Fischer, as we shall see, returned with Marshall to the Innominata basin a few weeks later, and on that occasion the party did bivouac lower down, thereafter using the glacier route for the ascent.

Kennedy in the meanwhile left Courmayeur until the weather should improve, when he intended to make another attempt on the route, which was considered to be 'not only practicable, but comparatively easy.' Continued bad weather prevented any second attempt before the end of Kennedy's holiday. Fischer then joined Marshall and persuaded him to try the line of ascent thus discovered.⁶⁴ The fatal accident on the return from that attempt robbed Kennedy of his friend and of his great guide. He never brought himself to visit the Innominata basin again.

⁶³ Andreas Fischer : *Hochgebirgswanderungen*, 1924, p. 112.

⁶⁴ *The Times*, September 9, 1874.

(To be concluded.)