GIRDLESTONE AND THE MATTERHORN ACCIDENT, 1865

By T. GRAHAM BROWN

It is probable that Edward Whymper began to write the text of his *Scrambles amongst the Alps*[1] soon after the conquest of the Matterhorn in 1865[2], and many factors may have combined to prevent the publication of the book before 1871, six years later. Amongst these factors must obviously be numbered Whymper's expedition to Greenland in 1867, and the protracted work demanded by the numerous and delicate wood engravings with which *Scrambles* was illustrated.

A word may perhaps be given in passing to the illustrations in *Scrambles*. As Whymper himself tells us,[3] the original drawings were his own work, except in some cases such as the engravings made from photographs. These drawings were reduced in size and transferred in mirror image on to the wood by draughtsmen in the Whympers' wood-engraving business. The draughtsmen occasionally added their own monograms, and this has led Mr. Arnold Lunn to assume that they were also responsible for the original drawings, whilst Whymper only supplied ' slight memoranda ' (Whymper's own obvious understatement). But (to cite two examples), the very accurate view from the crest of Col Dolent (with the monogram of J. Mahoney) could *only* have been drawn in detail by Whymper himself, and the view of the Grandes Jorasses (with a similar monogram) is the direct reproduction of a photograph. It is therefore clear that such monograms tell no more than the name of the draughtsman who transferred the originals to the wood and possibly arranged or ' framed ' the pictures. The actual engraving of the wood was then done by Whymper and his father, and, as Whymper again tells us in 1871, it ' occupied a large part of my time during the last six years.'

Whymper gave the same meticulous care to the preparation of his final manuscript and to the production of the illustrations for the book. In the former case, every line was written as it was to appear on the printed page, and the positions of the illustrations embedded in the

[1] First published in 1871 (two editions that year); sixth edition (edited by H. E. G. Tyndale) in 1936. In some cases, references to both the first and sixth editions are given below.

[2] There is some internal evidence in *Scrambles* which supports this suggestion. Thus A. W. Moore's *The Alps in 1864*, which gives his climbing journal for that year in a corrected form, was printed privately in 1867; but Whymper's quotations from Moore's journal in *Scrambles* evidently give the original MS. version—a fact which at least suggests that Whymper wrote that part of his text before the appearance of Moore's book in 1867. See *Scrambles:* 1871, pp. 188, 203; 1936, pp. 153, 158.

[3] *Scrambles:* 1871, preface p. vii.

text (at that time a novelty) were clearly indicated.[4] In the case of the full page illustrations, a special paper had to be manufactured in order to give proper effect to the extremely fine engraving,[5] and a special paper was also made for the text of the book. The large illustrations were printed by the Whymper firm under the supervision of Whymper himself, and his understandable pride in the whole production had expression, perhaps, in a few 'proof' copies of *Scrambles*, for which he selected the individual impressions both of the full-page illustrations and of those in the text.[6]

The construction of the text of *Scrambles* must have been given as great, or even greater, thought by Whymper. He had an unusually attractive and dramatic story to tell—that of his own part in the stalking and capture of nearly the last, but certainly the greatest, of the virgin Alpine peaks which were the conventional quarries during the golden age of the sport. *Scrambles* is, as it were, Whymper's display of the tiger's skin, and he prepared it carefully. Thus he did not mention even the existence of the Matterhorn in the account of his first visit to Zermatt, and he kept it in reserve for introduction to the reader when, in Chapter IV, the time came for the story of his own first attempt on the mountain. Similarly, Whymper did not mention Charles Hudson's serious interest in the Matterhorn, and preparations for an attempt on it, but brought him for the first time into the story on the very eve of the conquest, so that Hudson appears as an almost accidental and casual character in the epic. There was nothing careless or haphazard in the construction or detail of the text of *Scrambles*, and what Whymper suppressed or omitted is often as revealing as some of his apparently insignificant insertions.

One seemingly trivial suppression concerns us here—that of the name of the sick Englishman whom Whymper befriended at Valtournanche in 1865 a few days before the conquest of the Matterhorn. This was the Rev. A. G. Girdlestone, and there was no secret about the name in 1871, because Girdlestone had already and recently referred to the incident in his own book.[7] Whymper did make a passing reference to Girdlestone by name in another connexion in *Scrambles*, and the suppression of the name in the present instance might perhaps have been made in rather unnecessary deference to the proprieties, for which Whymper was a stickler; but Girdlestone, as we shall see, played a greater part in the events than would appear

[4] This was told to me by my friend, the late Mr. H. F. Montagnier, who had it directly from Whymper. The manuscript was lost in the course of publication, and Whymper believed that it had been stolen.

[5] The very bad reproduction of the original illustrations in the sixth edition (1936) was a crime against art, and it is only in one of the earlier editions that their delicacy can be appreciated. In a few of the 1871 full-page engravings (but not in any later edition) the sky was slightly tinted to give contrast—the tint was probably applied from a second block.

[6] Many years ago I was lucky enough to acquire one of these 'proof' copies of *Scrambles*. It had originally been given to a friend by Mr. Clark, the printer of the book, and he too must have been deservedly proud.

[7] A. G. Girdlestone: *The High Alps without Guides*, 1870, p. 45.

from *Scrambles*, and some other explanation is necessary. In 1865, as we shall again see, Whymper had been quite willing to invite Girdlestone to climb with him, but in the meanwhile a letter from Girdlestone which had appeared in the daily press,[8] and then the publication of his book, had given rise to controversy—Girdlestone's too exaggerated descriptions of mishaps during guideless climbs, and his strictures on guides, had not unnaturally antagonised the climbers of the day. Hence, perhaps, Whymper's reticence about Girdlestone's part in the events. As far as the *Scrambles* story goes, the invalid was apparently left at Breuil when Lord Francis Douglas and Whymper crossed the Saint Theodule pass to Zermatt for the attempt on the Matterhorn. That was not the case.

Some years ago one of my colleagues came under the surgical care of Mr. G. R. Girdlestone, nephew of A. G. Girdlestone, and at my instance he asked if the late Canon had left any climbing records. This led to the disclosure of a continuous climbing journal in the form of letters written year after year by the Canon to his mother and other members of his family, and Mr. G. R. Girdlestone generously presented them to the Alpine Club. This letter-journal contained amongst other good things an account of the adventurous attempt of Girdlestone and Utterson-Kelso to climb the Innominata face of Mont Blanc de Courmayeur in 1873,[9] and the letters written in 1865 supply Whymper's omissions in *Scrambles* ; but perhaps their chief interest will be held to lie in the brief account of the Matterhorn disaster which Girdlestone heard from Whymper's own lips on July 16, the day after Whymper's return to Zermatt from the Matterhorn, and is, with one exception, the earliest moderately full record of Whymper's story.[10] The letters in question were ' edited ' in blue pencil by Girdlestone, apparently for his projected book (that published in 1870) ; but in the event he included very little about his experiences on this occasion. The

[8] *The Times*, August 27, 1867. [9] Printed in *A.J.* 53. 53, 1941.

[10] The earliest reliable published story of the disaster is that given in *The Times* of July 22, 1865, in a letter dated July 16 from the Rev. J. M'Cormick, who had the story from Whymper soon after the latter's return to Zermatt on July 15, but the description of the accident itself is very brief. Girdlestone's more detailed version was actually written from memory or from notes not later than the morning of July 20, and therefore before any other version had appeared in print. The earliest extant record of Whymper's story of the accident in his own words is that given by him on July 21, 1865, at the official inquiry, but not published until 1920 (*A.J.* 33. 235–37). He next wrote an account in the visitors' book of the Monte Rosa hotel, Zermatt, probably on July 22, but this was stolen in or before 1869 (*A.J.* 31. 88). Whymper then described the accident in a long letter, intended for the foreign press, which he addressed to von Fellenberg and dated at Interlaken on July 25. After he had returned home, Whymper re-wrote and modified this letter, dated it August 7, and sent it to *The Times*, in which it appeared on August 8. Whymper's next account was that given in *Scrambles*, 1871. *The Times* letter had by then been reprinted in the Alpine Journal (*A.J.* 2. 148–53, 1865), in *Swiss Pictures drawn with Pen and Pencil*, anon., n.d. [by Samuel Manning, *circa* 1866] ; in Zürcher and Margollé's *Ascensions célèbres*, 1869 (as a translation) ; in *Mountain Adventures*, anon., 1869 ; and doubtless elsewhere.

extracts quoted below are given as written in the original version with or without accents and so forth.

Girdlestone left London on June 21, 1865, with a friend who does not play a part in the story. On the 24th he was joined at Lausanne by a pupil, Walter Hargreave, who was due to meet his father at Zermatt on July 8. After an unsuccessful attempt to climb the Buet, they reached Chamonix in heavy and continuous rain on June 29, and on July 1 they went to the Jardin de Talèfre. This last expedition is described in a letter which Girdlestone began to write at Courmayeur on July 4; but his illness soon supervened, and he continued the narrative at Zermatt on July 16. They had slept at Montenvers after visiting the Jardin, and on July 2 they descended to Chamonix, where Whymper first comes into Girdlestone's story :

> 'Whymper who had such a wonderful escape on the Matterhorn a few years back, & Birkbeck who lay for weeks between life & death after a fall on Mont Blanc were both there. The former asked me to join him next day in making a new glacier pass to Courmayeur but I declined as I had long wished to see the much finer Col du Geant. After dinner at 6.0 we went up to the Montanvers & next morning [July 3rd] at 3.0 we all started up the Mer du [sic] Glace. Presently Whymper & his guides turned to the left while we turned to the right up the Glacier du Geant.'

Girdlestone had engaged Michel Payot and a porter 'as this pass is accounted a difficult one.' They reached the Col du Géant about midday; '& then roping in 2 separate parties of 2 we descended the somewhat formidable arrête [sic] on the italian side.' They reached Courmayeur at 8.30 P.M. to find that Whymper had arrived a long time before them. Whymper's new glacier pass was the Col de Talèfre, of which this was the first complete crossing, and his invitation to Girdlestone to take part in the expedition must naturally have included Hargreave, a boy aged 17 years.

They all made a late start on the following day, and drove together to Villeneuve, where Girdlestone and Hargreave left the carriage whilst Whymper drove on to Aosta. Girdlestone's objective was an ascent of the Grivola, and he and Hargreave walked up towards Cogne. They had a meal and slept at a wayside inn, where Girdlestone was taken ill : 'I ate & drank heartily & went to bed. But my pulse remained at 100 for days.' He managed to reach Cogne next day, July 5; but his illness continued, and on the 6th he went back to Villeneuve and drove to Aosta. The tryst with his pupil's father forced them to travel on, and they drove next day to Chatillon, from which they walked up towards Breuil on July 8. But Girdlestone reached the end of his tether at the village of Valtournanche :

> 'I gave up all idea of going on to Breuil that night, but sent off Hargreave that he might join his father. He found Whymper at Breuil who kindly came down next (Sunday) morning [July 9th]

> to nurse me.' Girdlestone needed medicine, so Whymper ' most kindly went down to Chatillon to get what I wanted, 7 hours fast walking—he slept at Valtournanche though all his things were at Breuil.'

Whymper returned to Breuil next morning to secure a bed for Girdlestone, who followed him slowly ; and Girdlestone's more immediate connexion with the Matterhorn begins with his next entry, written in another letter which he began to write in Zermatt on the same day (July 16) as that of the letter quoted above :—

> ' I spent Tuesday [July 11th] at Breuil amusing myself in various ways. In the first place an italian sent 7 porters & guides with irons & mallets & chisels to attempt the ascent of the Matterhorn, & if they got up to come down & bring him up, he not liking trouble. I could watch their progress through my glasses. They took up provisions for several days wh: was lucky as on Friday afternoon [July 14th] Whymper from the summit saw them still quite 2000 ft. below. Then Whymper was making his preparations for an attempt airing his tent & so forth. The Italian had engaged all W's old guides, & bribed one whom he did not want himself not to go with W^r^. Then people began to come over the Theodule & first a young fellow with an axe with whom we began to fraternise. He turned out to be Lord F. Douglas only just 18 but already a first rate mountaineer. . . . Whymper & he & I lay sunning till dinner. We arranged that if it did not rain we would start at midnight to cross the St. Theodule to Zermatt.'

It is a pity that Girdlestone says nothing about the conversation they had that afternoon, nor about the reason for Lord Francis Douglas' mysterious flying visit to Breuil. With regard to the former, there is as it were secondhand evidence (to be given later) through Girdlestone that Douglas told them about his ascent of the Obergabelhorn from Zinal, and described how he and ' old ' Peter Taugwalder were saved by Joseph Vianin, the second guide, when the cornice broke under them. This was probably the source of Whymper's information, where, writing in *Scrambles* about the events of this particular day, he refers to the ascent (but not to the accident), saying of Douglas : his ' recent exploit—the ascent of the Gabelhorn—had excited my wonder and admiration ' (p. 382 ; *p. 303*).[11]

The mystery about Douglas' visit to Breuil is largely caused by Whymper's narrative, which seems to suggest that Douglas did not project a personal attempt on the Matterhorn before meeting Whymper. The passage runs : ' He [Douglas] brought good news. Old Peter had lately been beyond the Hörnli, and had reported that he thought an ascent of the Matterhorn was possible from that side. Almer [recently discharged from Whymper's service] had left Zermatt, and could not

[11] Here and later, the first page number is that in the first edition of *Scrambles* (1871), and the number in italics is that in the sixth edition (1936).

be recovered, so I determined to seek for old Peter. Lord Francis Douglas expressed a warm desire to ascend the mountain, and before long it was determined that he should take part in the expedition.' (p. 382 ; *pp. 303–304*). In addition, it appears from *Scrambles* that Douglas and his porter had come unladen from Zermatt with the intention of spending one night only at Breuil before going back (pp. 381–382 ; *p. 303*). Further, it is clear from *Scrambles* that the weather of the past few days had been thoroughly bad.

There can be little doubt that ' old ' Peter Taugwalder, who had been Douglas' leading guide during the two recent attempts on, and the subsequent ascent of, the Obergabelhorn, and was to be his guide for the Matterhorn a few days later, was in Douglas' employment at this time. But Douglas crossed the Theodule pass to Breuil with only the younger of ' old ' Peter's two sons, a porter, and not even with ' young ' Peter, the elder son, who often acted as second guide to his father. It is therefore certain that Douglas had no serious climbing objective, and the flying nature of his visit to Breuil in bad weather excludes the motive of sightseeing in a valley new to him. The probable reason for Douglas' hurried visit almost suggests itself : he had apparently sent ' old ' Peter, his guide, to reconnoitre the Matterhorn for a projected attempt by the Zermatt ridge, but the weather then broke and Douglas, whilst waiting for good conditions, dashed over to Breuil on the chance that he might find Jean-Antoine Carrel and engage that great guide's services for his own attempt in addition to those of ' old ' Peter. This is, of course, guess-work, but Douglas apparently did nothing at all in Breuil—because (on this surmise) Carrel was out of reach and was actually making an attempt on the Italian ridge of the Matterhorn at the time. Whymper at that same time had no guides and no party, nor any immediate prospect of forming a party, for an attempt on the Matterhorn. Even if the above guess should be wide of the mark, there is therefore something rather magnificent in Whymper's words about Douglas : ' before long it was determined that he should take part in the expedition ' ; and if the guess is right, it was Whymper who accepted the invitation of Douglas to join him in his projected attempt.

Girdlestone, in his weak state, cannot have relished a midnight start for the Theodule pass, and his narrative continues directly :

' Happily it did rain so I got a long night & we started soon after 9.0 [July 12th]. It was very cold wh: was beneficial for me. At the glacier I would not allow them [Douglas and Whymper] to go at my invalid's pace, however, they waited for me at the little hut at the top as they were afraid I might tumble into a crevasse. There I had hot wine & tea & then we roped together & proceeded rapidly down the glacier. At Zermatt Hudson & Hadow with Croz a first rate Chamouny guide were meaning to try independently the Matterhorn, so the two parties joined and set off on Thursday morning [July 13th] I having sat with them all on the

previous evening whilst they arranged their plans. Indeed I should probably have joined them had not my recovery been so slow.'

Girdlestone again, most unfortunately, says nothing about the conversation or the incidents of that evening.

On July 13, Girdlestone walked up to the Gornergrat and returned to Zermatt after making an arrangement to climb Monte Rosa with two men he had met at the Riffelberg inn. For this purpose he engaged Franz Biener (one of Whymper's guides earlier that season) and a porter, and walked up to the Riffelberg on July 14. Later he adds :

'I forgot to say that at 2.0. P.M. on Friday [July 14th] I saw through a glass Whymper & Croz just arrived at the summit of the Matterhorn & running along the ridge. This had delighted me immensely & made me enjoy the Mt Rosa all the more.'

This confirms one incident in Whymper's narrative, but it has no connexion with what we may call the preceding race up to the summit, on which Girdlestone throws new light a little later.

Girdlestone climbed Monte Rosa on July 15th, being then ignorant of the tragedy on the previous day, and he returned to sleep at the Riffelberg—

'after one of the most enjoyable days I have ever had. . . . But our happiness was immediately awfully damped by hearing of the catastrophe on the Matterhorn. How deeply I feel it having been intimately mixed up with the party amid their preparations I cannot say. I slept at the Riffel Saturday night & on Sunday morning [July 16th] went down to Zermatt in time for church & to comfort poor Whymper who had no other friend there. . . . Whymper & the regular chaplain [Joseph M'Cormick] had departed at two in the morning to find the bodies. They returned soon after dinner about two P.M. & I immediately went to see poor Whymper.'

Girdlestone then continues directly with the story of the accident, obviously as he heard it from Whymper himself on the afternoon of July 16. The letter proceeds :

'They had found the Matterhorn very much easier than they had expected, it had never been fairly tried before on the Zermatt side. Whymper & Croz & Hudson had raced up the last part to the top unroped it was so easy. There was only one difficult place round a hump. They had a splendid view & after leaving the summit were going cautiously down some smooth rocks at an ∠ of 40°. Croz 1st then Hadow a young fellow of 18, quite inexperienced in rock work, then Hudson a veteran climber of the greatest experience, then Douglas—a son of the Marchioness of Queensbury, then Taugwald a guide then Whymper & then a

younger Taugwald. Croz had just placed Hadow's feet in a proper position & was turning to descend, when Hadow slipped out of his footing & knocked over Croz a very powerful & heavy man. The latter had just time to say Oh ! the sole remark that any one made, Hudson having no time to prepare was immediately pulled over by the jerk & Douglas followed. Taugwald caught hold of a rock but the jerk passed through him to Whymper who had placed his axe in front of him. Those two managed to resist the jerk between them to such an extent that that [sic] the rope broke between Taugwald & Douglas otherwise all 7 must have been launched into eternity. The bodies fell about 4000 ft. Whymper & the two guides [' old " and " young " Peter Taugwalder] had to sleep that night.standing on a ledge, roped together & he got back about 2 P.M. to Zermatt on Saturday [July 15th].'

This account of the Matterhorn accident is obviously that given on July 16 by Whymper to Girdlestone, who wrote it (perhaps from a memorandum) in his letter three or four days later—that is, on or before July 20. It is therefore earlier than any extant version by Whymper himself either in writing or as evidence on July 21 before the official inquiry, and it is the first record of what Whymper believed to have been the cause of the accident—namely, that Hadow slipped and fell down upon Croz. But what in general is remarkable about this, Whymper's immediate story, is its almost exact correspondence with all which Whymper subsequently wrote, most consistently, about the incidents at the very time of the accident itself. Taken as a whole, the ' Girdlestone ' report of Whymper's story adds only two small pieces of information to those we already know. One of these is trivial, the other is of some importance.

To take the former first : Whymper describes in *Scrambles* how, during the ascent, they reached the final snowslope above the difficult passage, and ' the slope eased off, at length we could be detached [i.e., they could unrope], and Croz and I, dashing away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which ended in a dead heat. At 1.40 P.M. the world was at our feet, and the Matterhorn was conquered ' (p. 389 ; *p. 313*). This excludes Charles Hudson from the moment of conquest, but I have for long had doubts about the accuracy of the story. It is incredible that such a guide as Michel Croz could leave Hudson, his employer, to coil and bring up the rope, whilst he himself rushed forward selfishly to get to the summit first ; and from all we know of Hudson, who had a natural aptitude for taking the lead in athletic feats of any sort, it is equally unbelievable that he would have remained passively behind on this occasion. Sure enough, Whymper's *first* story, given above, includes Hudson in the ' race ', which probably started after the whole party had assembled and unroped on the last moderately easy slope. The point of interest in this otherwise trivial incident is that Whymper, in *Scrambles* and elsewhere, suppressed much of Hudson's part in it, just as he suppressed Hudson's careful preparations for an attempt on

the Matterhorn by the Zermatt arête, the details of which Whymper certainly knew[12]. These are two instances only of the craftsmanship which Whymper gave to the text of *Scrambles*.

The second new point in Whymper's story to Girdlestone concerns the movements of Whymper and ' old ' Peter Taugwalder immediately after the slip happened. In *Scrambles*, Whymper merely says: ' immediately we heard Croz's exclamation, old Peter and I planted ourselves as firmly as the rocks would permit : the rope was taut between us, and the jerk came on us both as one man.' But he adds in a footnote : ' Or, more correctly, we held on as tightly as possible. There was no time to change our position.' And again : ' Old Peter was firmly planted, and stood just beneath a large rock which he hugged with both arms.' But Whymper says nothing about his own stance or actions (p. 397 ; *p. 322*). As far as ' old ' Peter's movements are concerned, this does not really conflict with his evidence at the official inquiry, that he was able to pass the rope between him and Whymper round a projection of rock, which (unnoticed by Whymper) might have been done even if the rope had been conventionally ' taut ' at the moment of the slip. But with regard to Whymper : his story to Girdlestone adds the new information that he ' had placed his axe in front of him ' before the ' jerk ' came. This must mean that Whymper had had time to plant his ice axe in snow, and the rope may well have been slack enough during this movement for ' old ' Peter Taugwalder to do what he swore that he did.

That, however, is not the incident's chief point of interest, which lies in the inference to be drawn from it as to what Whymper could actually have seen of the events below him. To be able to plant his ice-axe effectively, Whymper must have been standing on reliable and only moderately steep snow, but not amongst steep rocks ; and if on such snow, then almost certainly a little above the lower edge of the snow-slope, with the steep and difficult place below him. From that position, Whymper can have had no adequate view of the movements below, as he himself stated in his evidence at the official inquiry and described later in *Scrambles*—he was not even sure if anyone was actually in movement at the moment of the slip (p. 396 ; *p. 321*). In spite of what Whymper said about ' old ' Peter's viewpoint, and in spite of what ' old ' Peter finally granted at the inquiry, it is possible that the guide was better placed than Whymper to see what happened, and that his story is the more reliable. The direct evidence of both is that Croz had guided Hadow's feet down into footholds. Everything else is surmise as far as *Whymper's* story goes—' je crois ' at the official inquiry, ' but it is my belief ' in *Scrambles* (p. 396 ; *p. 321*). Thus Whymper, on his own showing, only assumes that it was Hadow who slipped, and he only

[12] In his letter to *The Times* (published on August 8, 1865) Whymper refers to Hudson's special wire rope, which was not used ; and in the same letter he refers to M'Cormick's letters to *The Times*, in one of which (published on July 22) some details of Hudson's proposed party and of his preparations are given. Further, Whymper possessed and had read M'Cormick's pamphlet : *A Sad Holiday*, 1865, in which more information was available.

guesses that Hadow fell down on Croz and knocked him off—a series of events which, if true, would mean that the rope had been slack between Hudson above and Hadow below. The fact that Whymper writes more definitely in a footnote : ' Mr. Hadow slipped off his feet on to his back, his feet struck Croz in the small of his back, and knocked him right over, head first ' (p. 397 ; *p. 321*), does not alter the conclusion (from his own statements) that he was still surmising.

' Old ' Peter was more definite in his evidence at the official inquiry.[13] He stated there that Hadow did slip, that (in effect) Hadow did *not* knock Croz down, that Hudson [who had not a very secure stance, see *Scrambles* (p. 397 ; *p. 321*).] was *dragged* off and Douglas after him, and that ' they in turn dragged off the guide Croz, after the rope between myself and Lord Douglas had broken,' [' ceux-ci ensuite entraînèrent le guide Cropt [sic], après que la corde entre Lord Douglas et moi ait été brisée,'—this being the translation into French of ' old ' Peter's original Swiss-German, of which no record exists]. And he added : ' I am firmly convinced that, if the rope had not broken between Lord Douglas and myself, I would have been able to save them with the help of the guide Croz.' This last was in answer to the direct question whether the victims could have been saved if the rope had not broken, and, incidentally, the answer ' Yes ' is not what was to have been expected if ' old ' Peter, for his own safety in case of a slip on the part of a traveller below him, had deliberately used a weak rope between Douglas and himself. That is by the way. Our problem here concerns the events themselves, and 'old ' Peter's story is the one which I feel should be accepted.

There are, nevertheless, two points which might raise doubts about the guide's story. He was recalled to give more evidence, and M. Clemenz (the Coroner, as we may call him) quoted Whymper's surmise as if it was what he had actually seen, saying that Whymper had declared that Hadow slipped and knocked Croz off, and that the two of them had then pulled off Hudson and Douglas. At that time, no peasant-guide would have contradicted the direct statement of a ' Herr,' and in any case ' old ' Peter, having answered tactfully that Whymper may have been better placed to see, as he was above him, said that he did not insist on his own version of the events. I do not feel that anything can be made of such a retraction. The second point is the wording of Girdlestone's report, which suggests that Whymper, in his earliest story to Girdlestone, described what he only surmised as if it was what he had seen. But, as we shall see below, Girdlestone himself was by no means certain about this part of Whymper's story, and we may now return to his narrative, which continues directly :

> ' I went to bed early on Sunday evening. (I should say that I have been writing a good deal of this on the Aeggischorn) [14] & poor

[13] For the whole evidence at the official inquiry, see *A.J.* 33. 234–47. A translation of ' old ' Peter Taugwalder's evidence (only) will be found in the sixth edition of *Scrambles* (1936, pp. *374–78*), but not in any earlier edition.

[14] As this follows directly on the story of the accident, it is clear that Girdlestone wrote that part of his letter at the Hotel de la Jungfrau on the Eggishorn,

Whymper paid me a visit after I was in bed. I offered to stay with him if I could be of use, but as there was nothing I could do, & as I had written to my pupil (who had returned with his father to Lausanne) to meet me at Visp on Monday evening [July 17th] we settled that I should go on on Monday morning. [Girdlestone then gives some details, but nothing new, about the finding of the bodies that day—evidently as told to him by Whymper in his bedroom]. I walked down to Visp on Monday [July 17th], the greater part of the way with the gentleman who had acted as chaplain, a friend of Hudson's, who told me some very interesting things about him.' [15]

Girdlestone met Hargreave at Visp, and also ' two Alpine Club men [C. F. and G. E. Foster] with whom I arranged to try the Jungfrau.' They all drove to Brig next morning and walked up to Bel Alp. Next day, July 19, they walked to the Eggishorn ' in very good company viz : with [A. W.] Moore, Horace Walker (brother of Miss Walker the celebrated mountaineer) & [G. S.] Mathews all 3 jolly A.C.'s.' Girdlestone met R. W. Head at the Eggishorn : ' He had been up the Finsteraarhorn while waiting for me.' On July 20, the two Fosters, Girdlestone, and Head went to the Faulberg bivouac with three guides, but their attempt on the Jungfrau next day was stopped by bad weather.

Mathews, Moore, and Walker (and Walker's father, Francis) had made the first ascent of the old Brenva route on July 15, the day of Whymper's return from the Matterhorn. They slept at Chamonix that night and drove to Martigny next day, after Melchior Anderegg had bidden them adieu ' with unusual solemnity, and many abdurations both to us and Jakob [Anderegg, Melchior's cousin and the real hero of the Brenva ascent] to be cautious on any expedition we might attempt ; so far as we were concerned his warnings were superfluous, but upon Jakob they were, perhaps, not altogether thrown away.' [16] Next morning they went by train to Sion, where for the first time they heard of the Matterhorn accident. M. Brunner, their informant, ' had no details and was vague about names, but we made out that Whymper, Hudson, and a ' Graf ' had been on the expedition, that the two latter

which he reached on July 19 and left again next day. The most likely (and latest possible) date for the actual writing of the accident story is the morning of July 20.

[15] If this chaplain was M'Cormick, he must have gone back to Zermatt, or may just have accompanied Girdlestone for part of the way ; but the chaplain in question may have been M'Cormick's substitute at the service on the Sunday, when he himself went with Whymper to find the bodies.

[16] Quoted from A. W. Moore's M.S. ' Journal ' in the possession of the Alpine Club. This is not a true diary, but a record in journal form which Moore wrote up from his diary for circulation amongst his private friends. The early years were composed during the winters after each climbing season, and there is internal evidence that, for instance, the journal for 1863 was written before February 1864. But this was not the case in later years, and the inclusion of printed extracts from the ALPINE JOURNAL in the M.S. volume for 1865 (here in question) proves that it was not composed before February, 1872. The written parts, however, may be taken to be nearly similar to the contemporary entries in Moore's real diary.

had perished, and that Whymper had escaped.' Moore's party went on to Kippel that day, and on July 18 they crossed the Bietschfluh pass to Bel Alp.

Moore and his friends were bound for Grindelwald, which they intended to reach by crossing the Mönchjoch from the Faulhorn bivouac; and with this in view they set out on July 19 for the Eggishorn—

> 'in company with Mr. Girdlestone who, having come from Zermatt, was able to give us some particulars of the Matterhorn tragedy; we now learned definitely that the party had been composed of Whymper, Hudson, Lord F. Douglas, Hadow, Michel Croz, and the two Taugwalders; that the ascent had proved less difficult than had been expected, and had been effected from the direction of the Hörnli; and that, on the descent, some one had slipped on the only really bad place on the mountain, with the result that the whole party perished, with the exception of Whymper and the Taugwalders, who owed their escape to the breakage of the rope.'

When Moore actually wrote these words in 1872, *Scrambles* had already been published, and in any case it had long been known, or at least believed, that Hadow was the member of the Matterhorn party who slipped and thus caused the accident. Writing as he did in that atmosphere of general agreement, Moore, if his pen had run freely, would almost automatically have written 'Hadow had slipped,' and *not* 'some one had slipped.' The inference is that Moore did not write his MS. *Journal* from memory or from brief contemporary notes, but from a real diary which he must have kept, and that his *Journal* gives a genuine account of the information he received at the time itself. If so, Girdlestone must have been less definite in what he told Moore than in the report of Whymper's story which he wrote home, and was quoted above; and that he was by no means certain of the facts is suggested by what Girdlestone said in a later letter that year.

Having returned to the Eggishorn on July 22 from his attempt on the Jungfrau, Girdlestone crossed the Oberaarjoch on July 25 and reached the Engsteln Alp, where he remained for some time. Writing home to his father on August 11, Girdlestone says:

> 'Whymper is at Interlaken in the lowest spirits. I cannot say whether it was he or one of the guides that saw Hadow slip, but there is no doubt he was the cause of the accident. D. [Douglas, to whom the slip had been attributed in some papers] was a very good mountaineer.'

This certainly qualifies Girdlestone's previous report and supports Moore's less definite description of the incident. It may be added here that Whymper was not in fact at Interlaken on or about August 11. He had left Zermatt on July 22 for Visp, where he slept. On the 23rd he

crossed the Gemmi pass to Kandersteg, and on the 24th he reached Interlaken, which he left again on July 26 for Neuchatel and the journey home through Paris. When at Interlaken, Whymper visited the reading room, obviously for the purpose of examining the daily papers of the past ten days; and it was there that, on July 25, he wrote (or at least dated) the long letter which, with translations into both French and German, was sent to von Fellenberg for publication by him in the foreign press (the *Journal de Genève* and *Der Buna* were suggested). These seem not to have been published, but a translation of Whymper's corresponding letter to *The Times* of August 8 appeared in the *Journal de Genève* on August 12.

The Rev. F. J. A. Hort was at the Engsteln Alp, where he heard Girdlestone's story, and one of his letters,[17] written on August 1 to his wife, gives some information from Girdlestone which is not to be found in the latter's letter-journal (the paragraphing below is mine):

> 'Girdlestone was at Zermatt at the time, and saw a great deal of Whymper, who . . . was resolved to do the Matterhorn, and equally resolved, when that was done, to give up mountaineering, because there were no more *new* great mountains to be conquered. . . . Girdlestone says that Mr. M'Cormick's letter to the *Times* was a very good one in all respects. He too [i.e. M'Cormick] was to have gone up, but arrived in Zermatt a day too late.'

This information about Whymper's *previous* resolve to end his mountaineering with the ascent of the Matterhorn was probably derived from Girdlestone's talks with Whymper at Breuil, and it is supported by other evidence. It throws an important light on Whymper's attitude to the sport, and on his motives—Whymper would seem to have been more eager for conquest than for climbing. Further, it would also seem that Whymper's strange abandonment of serious Alpine climbing after 1865 was not necessarily due to the Matterhorn accident. Hort's letter continues:

> 'If any one was to blame, it seems to have been poor Hudson in taking up a young fellow like Hadow, who was new to the Alps this year, and had only been on three or four expeditions; but he is said to have done very well on Mt. Blanc. . . .
>
> Every one seems peculiarly sorry for Hudson; he was so universally respected, and was himself so cautious and experienced a mountaineer. People naturally turn now to the touching account which he wrote of young Birkbeck's accident on the Col de Miage.
>
> Lord F. Douglas seems to have had an almost miraculous escape on the Gabelhorn two or three days before, when he was rash enough to go where Moore, one of the best and boldest mountaineers living, refused to go as too dangerous.'

These sentences, written on August 1, 1865, contain three pieces of what on that date was still private information which Hort had received

[17] F. J. A. Hort: *Life and Letters*, 1896, vol. 2, pp. 39–40.

from Girdlestone—Hadow's climbing record, the experiences of Douglas and Moore during their respective ascents of the Obergabelhorn, and the suggestion (at least) that Charles Hudson was perhaps open to blame. As was said above, they help to fill gaps in Girdlestone's letter-journal.

The facts that Hadow had previously climbed well on Mont Blanc, but was not an experienced climber, were not published before Whymper first mentioned them in his letter which was printed in *The Times* on August 8. At that time the only source of this information was Charles Hudson's statement during the discussion of plans at Zermatt on the eve of the attempt on the Matterhorn, as Whymper described in *The Times* letter, and later in *Scrambles* (p. 883 ; *p. 305.*). Thus Hort's reference to Hadow's climbing record is an echo, as it were, of what Girdlestone heard that evening in Zermatt, and it confirms Whymper's later accounts of the events. We know that Hadow's 'training' climb was an ascent of the Buet, and that his next climb was the ascent of Mont Blanc. We unfortunately do not know the remainder of the 'three or four expeditions' mentioned by Hort or the 'several other expeditions' mentioned by Whymper in *The Times*. It may be added that 1865 was *not* Hadow's first visit to Switzerland. Last summer I noticed an entry in the old Visitors' book of the Monte Rosa Hotel, now in the museum at Zermatt, which recorded that he was there early in September, 1864.

Hort's information about Lord Francis Douglas' near escape on the Obergabelhorn, and about Moore's prudence on the same peak twenty-four hours earlier, indicates that Girdlestone had discussed Douglas' mishap with Moore when they met at Bel Alp. In *Scrambles*, Whymper mentions Douglas' ascent of the Obergabelhorn in his account of their meeting at Breuil on July 11 (p. 382 ; *p. 303.* See also, footnote, p. 385 ; *p. 308*), but Whymper says nothing about the mishap.

What was the source of Girdlestone's information ? A few days before his death on the Matterhorn, Lord Francis Douglas had written a short account of his attempts on, and his ascent of, the Obergabelhorn (July 7 and preceding days). This he addressed to the Editor of the *Alpine Journal*, but it had not been posted, and it was found amongst his effects in Zermatt after his death.[18] Even if this was in an unsealed envelope, it is, however, unlikely that Girdlestone knew of it before he left Zermatt, because Whymper and M'Cormick had been engaged in the long and arduous search for the bodies on July 16, and there had hardly been time or inclination to examine Douglas' effects before Girdlestone left early on the morning of July 17. There can in fact be little doubt that this near escape was one of the things which Douglas related when he, Whymper, and Girdlestone lay in the sun at Breuil on July 11.

[18] See *A.J.* 2. 211, where Lord Francis Douglas' account is published with a note by A. W. Moore about his own experiences on the summit of the Obergabelhorn on July 6. Moore described his own ascent in his so-called *Journal* for 1865, in the MS. of which he inserted Douglas' account and his own note as a printed extract from the pages of the *Alpine Journal* (as above), and Moore's complete narrative was published in 1914 (*A.J.* 28. 273.).

There is one more point to be noticed in Hort's letter—the suggestion that Hudson was to blame for taking an inexperienced climber like Hadow on such an expedition, coupled with his passing reference to the Birkbeck mishap. The first, and the association of the two, may have been independent thoughts on the part of Hort; but I think that, through Girdlestone, both may well have been echoes of Whymper's own criticisms of Hudson, perhaps voiced during his visit to Girdlestone's bedroom. For many years after the Matterhorn accident, Whymper's adverse criticism of Hudson was implied rather than openly stated, at least in print; but Whymper became more explicit in late life, and he eventually allowed his bitterness against Hudson to appear in an unfair attack.[19] In this he blamed Hudson for taking a 'pupil,' the younger Birkbeck, on the attempt upon Mont Blanc from the Col de Miage in 1861, during which Birkbeck fell from the col (but without fatal result), and Whymper then criticised Hudson again for taking Hadow on the Matterhorn attempt. But the initiation of young Birkbeck, who was *not* a 'pupil,' had been specially entrusted to Hudson by the youth's father, Hudson's old climbing companion, who must have agreed with Hudson's plan of campaign; and Leslie Stephen and F. F. Tuckett, who were two of the most experienced pioneers and members of the party, were equally responsible. The fact is that this kind of 'apprenticeship' to mountaineering was a common and valuable practice in the Golden Age of the sport.

Whymper himself had little right to lay blame of this sort. His own first attempt on the Matterhorn in 1861 was made in his first season of climbing, when his previous experience was only that of a single high ascent of an easy mountain and a failure to climb another. His second and third attempts (with R. J. S. Macdonald) were made in his second season before he had increased his experience of other mountains, and he had only added the ascent of Monte Rosa to his list before he made his fourth attempt on the Matterhorn and had his well-known fall from near the Col du Lion during his descent from it. As we have seen, Whymper appears to have been willing to include an inexperienced boy in his party for the first passage of the Col de Talèfre in 1865, which must have seemed to threaten a descent on difficult rock; and his willingness to join Lord Francis Douglas in the successful attempt on the Matterhorn that same year (or to allow Douglas to 'take part in the expedition,' if you like) is another case in point. Douglas had done very little climbing in the Alps before the season of 1865, and, although certainly more experienced than Hadow, he was actually the younger of the two youths—he was only 18½ years old at the time of his death. Further, if Whymper knew about Douglas' mishap on the Obergabelhorn (which is difficult to doubt), it must have appeared to him to have been due to inexperience on the parts both of Douglas and his guide, 'old' Peter Taugwalder—although the later publication of Moore's note showed that they may have had no reason to suspect the presence of the cornice which broke under them. On all these counts

[19] See the *Strand Magazine*, vol. 37, p. 49, January 1909.

it is clear that Whymper himself had little cautious respect for inexperience either in himself or in his proposed companions.

Hort's letter has drawn us away from Girdlestone's more direct evidence concerning the Matterhorn accident, but the latter's letter-journal throws no further light on it. There is, however, one more entry, which at least adds a homely touch. Late in the season of 1865, on September 14, Girdlestone crossed from Ofen to Tarasp—'I regretted greatly not having an axe instead of my umbrella'!—and he added:

> 'I unfortunately left behind at the chalet my pipe wh: had acquired a great interest as poor Douglas had smoked it the 2 days before his death on the Matterhorn.'

This is perhaps additional evidence that Lord Francis Douglas' flying visit to Breuil was a somewhat hurried and lightly-laden affair; and with it we may end the story of Girdlestone's connexion with the Matterhorn in 1865.