

ERASMUS GALTON AND MONT BLANC

BY J. MONROE THORINGTON

THE ascent of Mont Blanc on September 5-6, 1850, by Erasmus Galton, was the last before that of Albert Smith (August 13, 1851). The adventure was reported in *The Illustrated London News* (February 8, 1851), and reprinted in part in *The Romance of Adventure* (London, 1853). Neither Mathews nor Montagnier contribute more about Galton, the family history being unpublished at the time of their writing.

Recently Galton's copy of the second edition of Auldjo's book on Mont Blanc (8vo, 1830) has come to light.¹ In it Galton inserted clippings and notes amplifying the record.

The first items refer to the ascent on August 29, 1850, by S. A. Richards and W. K. Gretton. An extract from Galignani's *Messenger* (September 5, 1850) almost duplicates the account in *The Times* (September 9), quoted in part by Montagnier. But there is a different, unsigned version from *The Daily News* (October 3), apparently overlooked by bibliographers, which follows :

' Having observed in your *Messenger* of the 5th September a communication relative to an ascent of Mont Blanc, I take the liberty of correcting a slight error contained in it, and of adding a few observations. Since 1847, no effort of the ascension of Mont Blanc had been crowned with success. Early in the present season a fruitless attempt has been made, and on the 6th of August the Duke of Genoa, brother of the present King of Sardinia, accompanied by a corps of 22 guides, resolved on attacking the giant of the Alps; he is an excellent walker, of light muscular build. Having traversed without accident the yawning crevasses of the Glacier des Bossons and the Tacounaz, the party arrived the first evening at the small ledge of rock of the Grands Mulets, a solitary island in the midst of an icy ocean. Here they prepared to pass the night; unfortunately a change of weather came on, and during the whole period they were exposed almost without shelter to the pelting of an awful and ceaseless snow-storm. In the morning, as no signs of clearing up appeared, they were compelled reluctantly to descend in a sad state from cold and wet, but happily without having any accident to regret. This bold attempt merited a better fate, but its ill-success did not prove a damper to other adventurous spirits. Three of our countrymen have since then effected the ascent in a most courageous manner; the fine weather and grand view of the Italian Alps and valleys has amply repaid their exertions. The first was the ascent of Mr.

¹ In the possession of Mr. Vernon Howard, of San Francisco, through whose courtesy we have examined it. [J. M. T.]

Richards on the 29th of August ; his companion, Mr. Gretton, on reaching the Grand Plateau, a large plain of snow at about 12,000 feet elevation, experienced those symptoms of nausea and accelerated pulsation of the arteries which arises from rarefaction of the atmosphere at those heights, and often prevent the hardy mountaineers themselves from advancing. He proceeded no further² (and this is the point in your account I wish to correct), but his companion reached the summit, and all went off very well as you have stated. On the 3rd of the present month, Mr. Gardner,³ a Scotch gentleman, was equally fortunate, but unhappily three guides had their feet more or less frozen. This gentleman, a day later, accomplished the scarcely less difficult feat of passing the Col du Géant from Chamonix to Cormayour, in Piedmont. Matters did not end here. On the 6th inst., Mr. Erasmus Galton reached the summit about 9 o'clock on a splendid cloudless morning. It is admitted that towards the last he walked as well as the guides themselves, and no ascent was ever more successful or more rapidly made. He felt no personal inconvenience, except cold and loss of appetite. There was a sharp wind on the top, but he could without difficulty have stayed there an hour, had not the guides, who appeared to suffer more than he, urged his return. The use of strong liquors on the ascent probably renders them more susceptible to cold than we are. The view (to use Mr. Galton's words), was magnificent, but of a nature too expansive to be comprehended by the imagination. Its numberless objects, which separately would produce great enjoyment, united confuse the ideas. The conduct of the guides was admirable, while exposing themselves to every risk, they allow the traveller to incur none. The only accident was the fall of a carrier of provisions into a crevice of twenty feet or so, whence he was extricated without hurt. Jean Tairraz, the chief guide of this and the last ascent, had one ear frostbitten, and another man suffered two or three days from an injury to his eyesight. To conclude, each ascent cost in all about £40. Six guides are requisite, and they must be first-rate men. The first night is passed on the ledge of the Grands Mulets ; to avoid avalanches, the party sets out again about one in the morning, so as to arrive early on the summit, and return the second evening. This year the glaciers are not so dangerous as usual, the snow which masked the crevices has been melted by the summer's heat, and none of those awful hairlike bridges of snow, by which former travellers have been compelled to pass, exist this season. The track is well marked, and if the weather holds fine another ascension may yet be made this autumn.'

Galton has entered two manuscripts of his own, the first being that written in the hotel book, September 8, 1850, at the request of the landlord :

² The source of the statement that Gretton did not reach the top is unknown to us. Galton has here placed a manuscript note : ' He *did* get up.' [J. M. T.]

³ J. D. Gardner, of Chatteris. [J. M. T.]

' Erasmus Galton, of Loxton, Somersetshire, left the Hotel de Londres et d'Angleterre [*sic*], on Sept. 5, 1850, for the ascent of Mont Blanc, taking with him six guides, the volunteer, and seven porters. The guides names were : Jean Tairraz, Victor Tairraz, Alexandre Devousseux, Joseph Tairraz, Jean Carrier, Basil Tairraz. Edward Tairraz and a friend joined the party as far as the bottom of the Grand Plateau, and then returned.

' The party started from Chamouni at 10 A.M., and did not reach the Grands Mulets, where they slept, till 4.45 P.M., owing to an accident to one of the porters. At midnight the whole party (excepting the porters, who had returned to Chamouni) continued to ascend and reached the summit at 9.30 A.M. The atmosphere throughout being quite clear, the party remained there about fifteen minutes, then began to descend. They arrived at the Grands Mulets at one o'clock P.M. and returned to Chamouni at 6.30 P.M.

' The writer cannot speak too highly of the conduct of his guides, and more particularly of Jean and Victor Tairraz who in every case of real difficulty, placed themselves in peril, to avert danger from their employer. Jean Carrier cut the steps in the snow and ice in descending ; this duty (which is one of considerable danger) he performed with the greatest of coolness.

' The chief obstacle to the ascent, was the difficulty of respiration, but the distress went off almost immediately, by lying down flat on the snow, till the lungs became inflated. Although the wind was blowing strong from the North-east, when the party was on the summit, the cold (although severe) was by no means so intense, as was imagined from previous accounts.

' The writer would only add for the information of those who may wish hereafter to ascend, that although the danger may be (under certain circumstances) very great for the whole party, yet from the excessive caution of the guides, and the total disregard of themselves, when real danger occurs, the risk of injury to the amateur himself is very slight.

' The views not only from the summit, but from many points, both in ascending and descending, are more grand and magnificent than can possibly be expressed in words, and have far more than compensated the writer of the above, for any trouble and fatigue that he may have undergone.

' It is but justice to the landlord of this hotel to add that he arranged the whole expedition, including the guides, at a few hours' notice, and that all his arrangements gave the greatest satisfaction.'

There follows a second manuscript, which Galton says is taken from his journal and which is the text of his article in *The Illustrated London News*. He states that he was travelling with a Mr. and Mrs. Kekewich, and that on his return he met in Chamonix his friend, Mr. Bolton King. It would be interesting if the larger journal could be discovered, as it probably contains an account of Galton's ascent of Mt. Etna, he having



ERASMUS GALTON IN HIS UNIFORM AS A 'MIDDY,' AGED 13. SILHOUETTE IN THE POSSESSION OF MR. WHELER GALTON AT CLAVERDON.

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thereby joined the small group of those (Saussure, Howard and Van Rensselaer, Comte de Tilly), who, before 1851, had ascended both Mt. Etna and Mont Blanc.

Inserted with the last-mentioned manuscript are seven crude wash-drawings by L. Jewitt (made from Galton's sketches), of which six were reproduced as woodcuts in *The Illustrated London News*. The seventh and unpublished drawing is a close-up of Galton himself, stretched out and well blanketed at 'The Grands Muletts [*sic*], our sleeping place.' Unfortunately the opaque white with which the drawings are lighted has oxidised badly and made them unfit for further reproduction.

Most curious are two clippings from Edinburgh papers, published with evident intent to capitalise on the success of Albert Smith's London entertainment which had opened on March 15, 1852.

From the *Edinburgh Advertiser*, Tuesday, March 8, 1853 :

'Waterloo Rooms.⁴ For two weeks only. The public is respectfully informed that Mr. Erasmus Galton's (*The Continental Traveller*) Grand Moving Panorama of his celebrated Ascent of Mont Blanc is now open. Miss Munton will perform a Variety of Scotch Airs on the Musical Glasses. To be followed by G. A. Sala's Panoptican Entertainment, introducing a Grand Comic Moving Panorama of a Procession of All Nations on an Overland Journey to the Crystal Palace, showing a few extra articles and visitors to the Exhibition from the original drawings of George Cruikshank and Alfred Doyle.'

From the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, Tuesday, March 15, 1853 :

'Waterloo Rooms, Regent Bridge. The Last Week of Mr. Erasmus Galton's (*The Continental Traveller*) Grand Moving Panorama of his Celebrated Ascent of Mont Blanc. To be followed by G. A. Sala's Comico-Grotesqueo-Pictorio-Musico-Eccentressemo Sympiorama Panoptican Entertainment.'⁵

⁴ In response to an inquiry the Edinburgh City Archivist informs me that according to a contemporary (1853) guide-book the Waterloo Rooms were opposite the old Post Office and consisted of two rooms one above the other. The lower room was a reading room open to the public at a small charge; the upper room was used for lectures, meetings, and 'popular amusements.' The Waterloo Rooms are no longer in existence. [D. F. O. D.]

⁵ The City Librarian of Edinburgh was good enough to have a search made in the columns of the *Evening Courant* for March, 1853, but no account of the Panorama could be found. In addition to the advertisement of March 15 (quoted by Dr. Thorington) the Panorama was also advertised in the issues of March 8 and March 22, 1853. The *Evening Courant's* notice of March 8 contains rather more information than is to be found in the *Advertiser* of the same date, and runs as follows :

WATERLOO ROOMS, Regent Bridge, for two weeks only. The Public is respectfully informed that Mr. ERASMUS GALTON's (*The Continental Traveller*) Grand Moving Panorama of his Celebrated ASCENT OF MONT BLANC is now open; an Entertainment rendered so popular by Mr. Albert SMITH's Ascent of the mountain now exhibiting at the Egyptian Hall, Piccadilly, London, to crowded and delighted audiences. This

Apparently embarrassed by such publicity, Galton sent a letter to *The Times* (March 28, 1853):

'My attention has been directed to an advertisement in several of the Edinburgh papers, headed "Mr. Galton's Grand Moving Panorama of his Ascent of Mont Blanc," &c., I beg to say that I am in no way connected with it—that my name has been made use of without my permission—that I do not know the man—and that I was quite unaware of such an exhibition until last week.

'As some sketches of my ascent of Mont Blanc were published in *The Illustrated London News* of February, 1851, and as my name is rather an uncommon one, I shall be obliged by your inserting this advertisement in your next paper.'

Galton has included in his collection two clippings relating to Albert Smith's ascent (Smith: *The Illustrated London News*, August 19, 1851; Floyd: *Daily News*, August 27, 1851), and two concerned with the Arkwright fatality (E. A. Pettit: *The Times*, October 18 and 20, 1866).

Erasmus Galton⁶ was the second brother of Sir Francis Galton (1822–1911), the pioneer eugenicist and authority on finger-prints, sometime member of the A.C., and editor of *Vacation Tourists* (1860–3). He was born at The Larches, near Sparkbrook, Birmingham, in 1815, of Quaker ancestry. His parents were Samuel Tertius (1783–1844) and Frances Anne Violetta Darwin (1783–1874) Galton. His maternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802), was the paternal grandfather of Charles Darwin (1809–82).

Although Erasmus Galton entered the Navy as a midshipman at the age of 13, he did not remain long at sea, as by 1840 or earlier he had

Gorgeous Panorama carries the spectator through the most interesting Scenery between Switzerland and Savoy, being a Tour from Geneva to Chamouni, and from thence to the summit of Mont Blanc, accompanied by a descriptive Lecture and Music, introducing a series of Alpine Melodies, including JULLIEN'S 'Echo du Mont Blanc,' etc.

To be followed by G. A. Sala's Comico-Grotesqueo-Pictorio-Musico-Eccentressemo Symposiorama PANOPTICAN ENTERTAINMENT, introducing a Grand Comic Moving Panorama of a Procession of All Nations on an Overland Journey to the Crystal Palace.

Doors open at Half-past Seven, to commence at a Quarter past Eight o'clock precisely.

The show must have been a success for the issue of March 22 announced that 'by Particular Desire' it would run for four extra nights, 'Positively Closing on Saturday, March 26.'

The *Edinburgh Advertiser* ceased publication about 1860 and the *Evening Courant* about 1886. [D. F. O. D.]

⁶ There are two principal sources of biographical information on Erasmus Galton; Sir Francis Galton, *Memories of My Life* (London, 1908), and Karl Pearson, *Life and Letters of Francis Galton* (Cambridge University Press, 1914). Mr. T. S. Blakeney has kindly supplied data from the latter work, in vol. 1 of which there are two silhouette portraits of Erasmus, one as a midshipman in 1828, and the other with his family in 1837. The Warwick Museum secured a water-colour of Erasmus and his parents at the sale of the contents of Claverdon (Sir Francis's house) in October 1954.

It is curious that Sir Francis, who had been a climber, nowhere mentions his brother's ascent of Mont Blanc. [J. M. T.]

settled down at Loxton Manor-house, Somersetshire, five miles from Weston-super-Mare, where he farmed his property, served as Magistrate and Deputy Lieutenant of the county, and spent most of his long life as a country gentleman, not leaving much mark on his generation and being completely overshadowed by his more famous relatives. About the time of the Crimean War he joined the Second Warwickshire Militia and became Major. Francis Galton visited him in camp at Aldershot.

Sir Francis, in 1902, when Erasmus was 87, refers to him as an active walker, and two years later, after staying with him at Loxton, writes that he thought Erasmus led an uncomfortable life, because of the hard work and manual labour connected with farming. It was his opinion that Erasmus had not got as much interest and 'go' out of life as he might have.

In 1905, Erasmus wrote to his brother from the Royal Victoria Yacht Club, Ryde, Isle of Wight, on agricultural matters, and says that he had contributed articles to the Royal Agricultural Society's *Journal* and to *The Field*. A year later, from the same address, he discusses the use of the compass, and remarks that he gets afloat in steamers often, but that the toss of a cow (apparently in 1903, when he was 88!) had spoiled his walking powers and his sea-legs.

In January, 1909, Erasmus Galton fell while boarding a tram and broke his leg. Sir Francis (who drew a sketch of the fracture through the neck of the femur) noted that Erasmus's 'walks and independencies' will have to end, as there is no prospect of the bone mending. Erasmus was stoical when the injury occurred and the first thing he said to those who picked him up was, 'It's all arranged, and mind, I'm to be cremated.' He died unmarried on February 23, 1909 (*The Times*, February 25), and so did not suffer long from his injury. He was cremated at Birmingham on February 26, and expressly desired that no mourning should be observed for him.

APPENDIX

John Dunn Gardner (1811-1903). On p. 103 above, mention is made of J. D. Gardner, of Chatteris, who ascended Mont Blanc on September 3, 1850, a few days before Erasmus Galton. Little has been written of Mr. Gardner; he published an account of his climb in 1851, but neither C. E. Mathews¹ nor H. F. Montagnier² has added anything new about the man and it may be worth while to fill in the picture a little.

He was not a 'Scotch gentleman' (above, p. 103) but came from East Anglia. His origins were indeed peculiar. He was born July 20, 1811, the son of Sarah (*née* Dunn Gardner)³ by John Margetts, of St. Ives.

¹ *The Annals of Mont Blanc*, p. 173.

² *A. J.* 25. 638.

³ She was the daughter of one Jane Gardner, of Chatteris (d. March 25, 1839), who eloped with the family solicitor, William Dunn (d. November 16, 1831). (See Dorothy Wellesley, *Far Have I Travelled*, p. 90.) Mr. Dunn on May 1, 1804, took the name of Dunn Gardner—*Alumni Cantabrigienses*, ed. J. A. Venn, pt. ii, vol. 2, 'Dunn Gardner.'

Sarah Dunn Gardner (b. 1786, d. 1858) had married, May 12, 1807, Lord Chartley, later 3rd Marquess Townshend, but left him within a year, alleging incapacity and unnatural habits.⁴

Indiscretions in the Press caused her husband to bring a libel action against the *Morning Herald* (June 1809), and though he won his case he only obtained relatively small damages.⁵ He was, indeed, notorious in his day; his father disinherited him, he left England, and died at Genoa on December 31, 1855.⁶ As his marriage was never dissolved, Sarah remained his legal wife and, on the death of the 2nd Marquess in 1811, she became Marchioness Townshend. She had, however, on October 24, 1809, gone through a marriage ceremony at Gretna Green with John Margetts and had several children, the eldest survivor of whom was John, the future mountaineer. But she cheerfully passed off her children as being those of the 3rd Marquess Townshend: John was baptised belatedly at St. George's, Bloomsbury, on December 26, 1823, under the name of Townshend and he was entered at Westminster School as 'Lord John Townshend.' From 1828 he assumed the style of Earl of Leicester (then the 2nd title of the Townshends) and as such he represented Bodmin in the House of Commons election of 1841.⁷

In 1842 John Margetts died and about the same time the Townshend family managed to get a bill introduced into Parliament (6 & 7 Vic.), declaring the children of Sarah illegitimate, and in Dod's *Companion* for 1843 John is called 'Gardner, John Dunn,' with a note, 'claimed to be eld. s. of 3rd Marq. Townshend and assumed the courtesy-title of Earl of Leicester, but dropped it in 1843'; and the entry remained unchanged till he left the House in 1847. Meantime, by the *Gazette* of August 10, 1843, he was authorised to take the surname of Dunn Gardner, and he had, in 1839, on the death of his maternal grandmother, already inherited the estate at Chatteris.

On the death in 1855 of the 3rd Marquess Townshend, the redoubtable Sarah promptly married again (properly this time), one James Laidler. She died September 11, 1858, and he on January 6, 1869, and there is a memorial to them in the cemetery at Kensal Green, though she is said to be buried namelessly at Chatteris.⁸

John Dunn Gardner married, firstly, in 1847, Mary Lawson, of Boroughbridge, Yorks⁹ and, secondly, Ada Pigott, of Dullingham House, Cambridgeshire. He became J.P. for the Isle of Ely, Deputy Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire and in 1859 was High Sheriff for Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.¹⁰

He had travelled widely in Europe; in 1844-5 he made a long tour in Greece; he visited European Turkey four times; and revisited Greece

⁴ *Farington Diary*, iv, 223; v, 75.

⁵ *The Townshend Peerage. A Full Report of the Curious Trial for Libel.* . . . (London, 1809, reprinted 1843.) Also *Annual Register*, 1809, p. 346.

⁶ *Complete Peerage*, vol. xii, pt. i, pp. 812-13.

⁷ In the official return of members he is described as John Townshend, commonly called the Earl of Leicester, and in Dod's *Parliamentary Pocket Companion* for 1841 he is entered as Leicester, E. of; eld. s. of the Marq. Townshend, b. 1811, a Conservative. (Information kindly given me by the Librarian of the House of Commons.)

⁸ Dorothy Wellesley, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁹ She died aged 21 in 1851—memorial tablet in Ely Cathedral.

¹⁰ *The Times*, January 14, 1903, and *Who Was Who*, 1897-1916.

and the Ionian Islands in the spring and summer of 1858.¹¹ He also speaks of having been in Russia.¹²

In August 1850 he, with his first wife and their young child, visited Chamonix, without any particular intention on his part of climbing Mont Blanc, though he had entertained the idea of doing so for some years. On September 3 he succeeded ; and on September 5 he crossed the Col du Géant to Courmayeur. There is no need to summarise these climbs, as nothing new occurred ; he does not seem ever to have done any more climbing.

He was for many years associated with the fine arts ; his notable collection of silver, antiques, etc., was sold at Christie's in April 1902, after having been on loan for some years at the Victoria and Albert Museum. In earlier days he took a keen interest in Ely Cathedral, to which he gave the reredos, after being associated with Sir Gilbert Scott in its design.

His political interests did not cease entirely when he left Parliament in 1847 ; his Ionian Islands pamphlet has already been referred to and he *may* have been the author of a similar pamphlet published in 1860, entitled, *A Few Words on the Eastern Question*, in which the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire is boldly advocated.¹³

John Dunn Gardner died January 11, 1903, in his 92nd year. It would seem to be the case that all the sons of Sarah were eccentric, with violent tempers, and they were probably somewhat embittered by the catastrophe of their mother's *cause célèbre*. One daughter went out of her mind ; one of the brothers, William, ruined himself breeding race-horses for Newmarket, and later went blind ; but John and the third brother, Cecil, had strong literary tastes, and lived more normal lives. We have seen that John travelled and wrote, and collected works of art (and a fine library, too) ; but he would seem later in life to have become something of a recluse. Cecil collected perhaps even a finer library ; he entered the Light Dragoons (the Blues) and served in the Crimean War, and was said to be one of the few survivors from Balaclava. Something of their characters can be gleaned from Dorothy Wellesley's, *Far Have I Travelled*, chapter vi.¹⁴

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¹¹ See his pamphlet, *The Ionian Islands in relation to Greece . . .*, written December 1858, published early in 1859.

¹² *Ascent and Tour of Mont Blanc* (1851), p. 45.

¹³ It is not certain if this anonymous pamphlet was his or not ; it was printed by the same man who had issued that on the Ionian Islands the year before, and the style is similar. But the anti-Turkish sentiments of the later work are not in keeping with those expressed earlier.

¹⁴ Dorothy Wellesley (7th Duchess of Wellington) ; John Dunn Gardner was her maternal grand-uncle.