

## AFTER THE MATTERHORN

1865-1880

BY H. E. L. PORTER

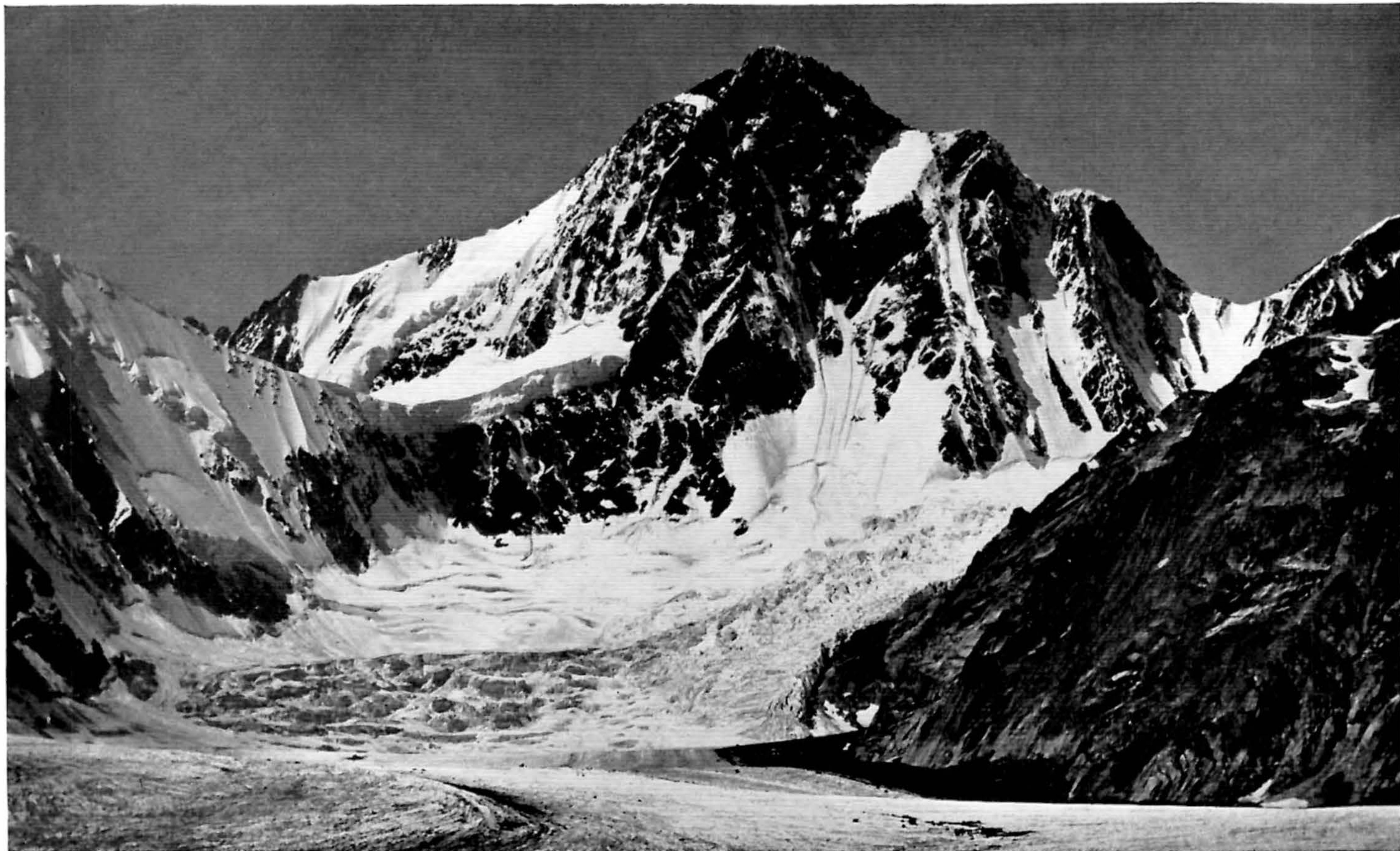
THE year 1865 was an eventful one. On the lighter side it witnessed the birth of 'Alice in Wonderland' and the discovery of the first complete skeleton of the Dodo, a bird which in the course of centuries had become almost as mythical as the Phoenix. It was also memorable for two major tragedies. In April the civilised world was shocked by the news of the assassination of President Lincoln. In July the death of three Englishmen and a French guide on the hitherto unclimbed Matterhorn created a sensation of almost comparable magnitude. Before that date, we are told,<sup>1</sup> Leslie Stephen was one of the heroes of the new sport of the upper middle class in mid-Victorian England, the conquest of the Alps, when the exploits of great climbers were followed with almost the same avidity as those of cricketers in the succeeding generation. After the accident the Press was unanimous in condemning a sport which could lead to such a tragedy. 'Why,' thundered *The Times*, 'is the best blood of England to waste itself in scaling hitherto inaccessible peaks, in staining the eternal snow and reaching the unfathomable abyss never to return?' *Punch* went so far as to pour scorn on the Rev. J. M'Cormick, Chaplain at Zermatt, for suggesting an appeal for funds to build a chapel there to commemorate the victims. Queen Victoria made a sad little entry in her diary about it, but refrained on this occasion from expressing her disapproval of dangerous Alpine expeditions to her Prime Minister, as she did in 1882. According to Coolidge,<sup>2</sup> who was then at the impressionable age of fifteen, 'there was a sort of palsy that fell on the good cause, particularly amongst English climbers. Few in numbers, all knowing each other personally, shunning the public as far as possible, they went about under a sort of dark shade, looked on with a scarcely disguised contempt by the world of ordinary travellers.' One result, he points out, was that not so many important peaks were vanquished from 1866 to about 1870 as in the previous five or six years and that the summits that fell in that dark period were the booty of very few men.

Captain Farrar's considered judgment<sup>3</sup> was that the death of Hudson and Croz and the retirement of Whymper held up the tide of mountaineering for fully half a generation of men. He bases this striking

<sup>1</sup> Noel Annan : *Leslie Stephen*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *The Alps in Nature and History*, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup> *A.J.* 32. 26.



*W. F. Donkin, 1882]*

NORTH-EAST FACE OF THE FINSTERAARHORN FROM NEAR THE ABSCHWUNG.

statement on the fact that no other formidable rock mountain was successfully attacked for many years, because the accident had eliminated the only men who at that stage had emancipated themselves from the fear of the mountains ; a temporary paralysis had set in, which only wore off with the advent of such men as Alexander Burgener.<sup>4</sup> Certainly there was a drop in the number of recruits to the Alpine Club. But there were other causes to account for the temporary slump, notably the unsettled state of Europe, resulting in the wars of 1866 and 1870. Incidents such as Tuckett's arrest in the Suldenal cannot have encouraged travellers, and there is ample evidence that the Swiss resorts were very empty in 1870. On the other hand it is undeniable that, to the faithful few, wars and accidents were no deterrent at all. In general the fathers of the Club did not forgo their annual month or two with their favourite guides in the late 'sixties and, in fact, many great climbs are recorded from those years. In the same month of July 1865 the Brenva route fell to G. S. Mathews, F. and H. Walker and A. W. Moore, brilliantly led by Melchior and Jakob Anderegg; Jean Antoine Carrel won his heart's desire on the Italian side of the Matterhorn ; and, in early August, Hornby and Philpott guided by Christian and Ulrich Almer, C. Lauener and J. Bischoff scaled the Silberhorn from the Lauterbrunnen valley. From 1867 onwards a goodly list of new expeditions appears in each number of the ALPINE JOURNAL, associated mostly with a few familiar names, F. F. Tuckett, D. W. Freshfield, A. W. Moore, the Walker and Mathews families, etc. In December 1866 Moore and Horace Walker initiated the cult of winter mountaineering by crossing the Strahlegg and the Finsteraarjoch, and this cult during the next decade won many adherents, Coolidge and Christian Almer, James Eccles and G. Loppé being the chief contributors to its advance. The 'seventies started badly with the disaster on Mont Blanc, which cost a whole party of eleven their lives, but attracted little notice, public attention being distracted by the Franco-German war. The war over, the stage was set for new performances with many new actors. In the Dauphiné, still primitive and neglected despite some brave efforts in the 'sixties by Whymper, Tuckett and Moore to elucidate its mysteries, Coolidge and Christian Almer now began a systematic exploration, though the greatest prize of the district, the highest peak of the Meije, the last of the giants, eluded them, and fell to the Frenchman, Boileau de Castelnau, guided by Pierre Gaspard and his son in 1877. In 1873 Clinton Dent began the long series of attacks on the Dru, which he brought to a final successful conclusion at the 18th attempt in 1878 in the grand company of J. Walker Hartley, 'the best and most skilful amateur of his time', Alexander Burgener and Kaspar Maurer. In 1879 G. A. Passingham, one of the toughest

<sup>4</sup> *A. J.* 24. 19.

men of all the climbing fraternity of the 'seventies, whose predilection it was to climb his peaks from the valley without a bivouac, crowned a career of vigorous achievement by the ascent of the West face of the Weisshorn with Louis Zurbrücken and Ferdinand Imseng. In 1872 R. and W. M. Pendlebury and the Rev. C. Taylor followed the same brilliant and meteoric Imseng up the fearsome Macugnaga face of Monte Rosa. Thomas Middlemore, a strenuous figure who aroused feelings of violent opposition in the breasts of the orthodox, shone like a comet from 1871 to 1876, his career culminating in that glorious week when with J. O. Maund, Henri Cordier, Jakob Anderegg, Hans Jaun and Andreas Maurer, he conquered Aiguille Verte and Les Courtes from the Argentière glacier and Les Droites from the Talèfre. Two great routes from Italy to the top of Mont Blanc must not be omitted; T. S. Kennedy's route *via* the Glacier du Mont Blanc with Johann Fischer and J. A. Carrel in 1872, and in 1877 the classic route, not to be repeated for forty-four years, by which James Eccles, Michel and Alphonse Payot from a bivouac on Pic Eccles, forced their way *via* the Brouillard and Fresnay glaciers and the Peuterey ridge to the summit in  $8\frac{1}{4}$  hours. As for the Matterhorn itself, once the evil spell on the Hörnli ridge had been broken by the ascent of the Rev. Julius Elliott with Peter Knubel and J. M. Lochmatter in 1868, the route became so popular that by 1880 one hundred and thirty-two ascents had been recorded as against only twenty-seven from Breuil. Güssfeldt, the most intrepid of the German climbers of the day, who made the ascent in 1868 and again in 1879, remarks<sup>5</sup> on the amazing improvement in the ridge between his two visits. It had, in fact, become an easy day for a lady. Now in 1879 the reputedly impregnable Zmutt arête succumbed to the friendly rivalry of two superb parties on the same day, A. F. Mummery with Alexander Burgener, Augustin Gentinetta, and Johann Petrus who arrived first, and W. Penhall with Ferdinand Imseng and Louis Zurbrücken.

This bare summary of the outstanding climbs of the period must suffice, though it might easily be extended. All of them were achieved within 'half a generation of men' from 1865. The more they are studied, the more doubt they breed as to the validity of Captain Farrar's famous dictum. These are not the exploits of men daunted by fear of the mountains. Those who conceived and executed them displayed initiative and technical skill of the highest order. The men, who made them possible were that small body of hardy peasants, accustomed to hill-scrambling from birth, strong and intelligent, who led their mostly British employers to victory after victory. In *Pioneers of the Alps* there are biographies of twenty-two guides, chosen by pre-eminent amateurs of the day as the greatest craftsmen of their time.

<sup>5</sup> *In den Hochalpen*, p. 165.

Of the twenty-two the Oberland claimed ten, Chamonix five, the Vispatal four and Italy three. Of the Oberlanders the oldest was the picturesque giant, Ulrich Lauener, 'the very picture of a true mountaineer', while it is generally agreed that Christian Almer and Melchior Anderegg were in a class by themselves, dominating the Alpine world from 1860 to 1880. Christian Almer has to his credit the longest and most splendid list of first ascents ever recorded. Melchior Anderegg has been called the headmaster of the great school of Oberland guides: his one failing seems to have been an excess of caution, which might perhaps be deduced from his famous remark on the summit of the Dent Blanche in a discussion of the feasibility of the Zmutt arête: 'Ja, es geht, aber ich gehe nicht'. St. Niklaus produced Peter Knubel, 'the earliest of the modern specialist guides', Josef Imboden, a guide in summer, a polyglot courier in winter, a man of substance and of great influence among his fellows, and Alois Pollinger, great founder of a great family. From Saas Fee came Alexander Burgener, immortalised by Dent and Mummery, surely the most colourful of all guides. Italy could pride herself on J. A. Carrel, magnificent in achievement, heroic in death, on the superbly gifted Emile Rey, and on J. J. Maquignaz, of whom Tyndall after the first traverse of the Matterhorn remarked in his portentous way<sup>6</sup>: 'Josef is a man of high boiling-point, his constitutional sangfroid resisting the ebullition of fear.' Chamonix was redeemed by a few great men: François Dévouassoud, equally at home on mountain or in great city, philosopher and friend, a master of quaint phrases to fit any occasion, such as 'My dear Sir, take a patience, it is the life!'; and Michel Payot, pupil and successor of Michel Croz, who travelled with Eccles for forty years.

The exceptional men were never numerous enough to satisfy the requirements of the growing body of climbers during the 'seventies, while the vast majority of guides were neither capable nor enterprising enough to plan and execute fresh expeditions. There are many comments on the domineering disposition and exorbitant demands of a certain type of guide, of their tendency to romance and to circulate untruths.<sup>7</sup> These unpleasant traits were particularly associated with the rank and file of the Chamonix guides, produced by the thoroughly vicious rota system, which had frozen the whole Corps de Guides into a closed shop of the worst kind. Protest after protest against the system by the Alpine Club and other influential bodies throughout the period is recorded, but had little effect beyond extorting some concessions to A.C. members and providing some loopholes, by which the regulations might be outwitted. Typical of the Chamonix mentality was the treatment of Almer and Biener after the first ascent of the Aiguille Verte in 1865: 'An unforgivable offence had been committed; two foreign

<sup>6</sup> *Hours of Exercise*, p. 289.

<sup>7</sup> *A.J.* 9. 437.

guides had been employed. Almer and Biener were chivvied from pillar to post: they were liars, yes liars; they had not climbed the Aiguille Verte. The tumult grew and grew, until T. S. Kennedy confronted the ringleaders of the malcontents. . . .'<sup>8</sup>

If such defects had some influence in decreasing the employment of guides, it was much more their own sturdy self-reliance that drove men like Hudson and Kennedy and the Smyths unassisted by a new route to the top of Mont Blanc. 'One is much inclined to think', wrote Captain Farrar in his incisive way,<sup>9</sup> 'that at one period these Hudsons, these Smyths, these Ramsays, these Parkers, these Youngs, these Buxtons and others were within measurable distance of diverting the stream of English mountaineering from the course it eventually took and of forming a great school of English guideless climbers.' The time was not yet ripe for that: for one thing most members of the Alpine Club, then and long after, were opposed to a practice, which might provide ammunition to that section of the Press and the public, which affected to regard it as a 'Society of homicidal monomaniacs'. Yet at this early stage guideless climbing did continue to attract some who were justly confident in their own prowess and some who were overconfident. Among the latter was the Rev. A. G. Girdlestone, who in 1870 gave an ingenuous account of his experiences in his book *The High Alps without Guides*, surely the Duffer's Drift of mountaineering literature, unconsciously giving lesson after lesson what not to do if one wishes to survive. 'I use the same rope for several seasons in succession,' he says, 'though it certainly becomes weaker.' Like Savage Landor in Tibet, he wanders through the Alps in a straw hat and considers that the ice-axe recommended by the A.C. combines in itself every possible fault.<sup>10</sup> No wonder Mr. Grove in his devastating analysis of the book found nothing to admire in his methods. It is a curious paradox that the only praise the book received from a seasoned climber was that of Coolidge, the bitter opponent of the practice of guideless climbing, who describes it as thrilling.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, the trio from Rossall, Cust, Cawood and Colgrove, finding themselves in excellent form at the end of their holiday in 1876 quietly attacked the Matterhorn and won well-deserved laurels by making the first guideless ascent of it. Two years later a new era was initiated by the Pilkington brothers and Frederick Gardiner. 'Before 1878', in the words of Charles Pilkington,<sup>12</sup> the leader of this resolute and supremely competent party, 'there had been no attempt to spend a holiday systematically climbing the difficult peaks of the Alps without guides . . . the first party that tried the experiment made several tours, during which they climbed without previous knowledge many of the difficult peaks and

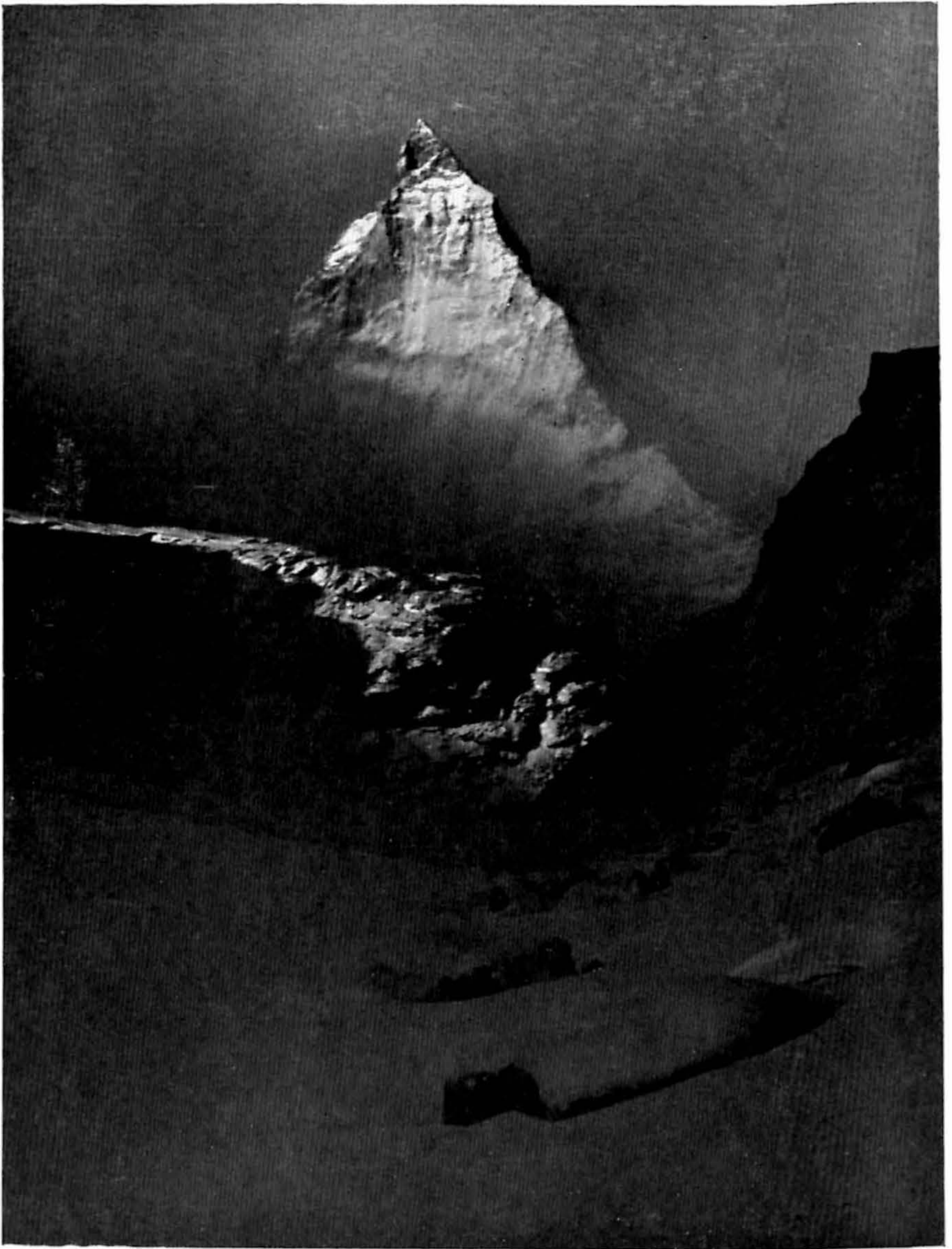
<sup>8</sup> Smythe: *Edward Whymper*, p. 170.

<sup>9</sup> *A.J.* 30. 196.

<sup>10</sup> p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> *The Alps in Nature and History*, p. 248.

<sup>12</sup> *A.J.* 24. 21.



*Photo, F. S. Smythe]*

WINTER SUNRISE ON THE MATTERHORN.

*[To face p. 44.]*

passes of the Alps, and with the exception of the Dent Blanche, when a high wind arose, never failed to reach their summit or cross their pass. Nor were they benighted except on one peak, where knowing what had happened to all their predecessors arrangements were made beforehand to bivouac on the rocks.' That was on the occasion of their greatest feat, the first guideless ascent of the Meije in 1879. There was nothing haphazard about this party, the first to reach quasi-professional standards. They were not condemned by their fellow-members, for they brought no discredit on mountaineering by attempting climbs beyond their powers.

Female climbers were few but persistent. Miss Lucy Walker, the most famous of them, went everywhere with her father and brother. She was the first lady to climb the Matterhorn (July 1871), to the chagrin of Coolidge's aunt, Miss Brevoort, who was at Zermatt at the same time for the same purpose, but had to be satisfied with the honour of being the first lady to do the traverse. The sisters, Anna and Ellen Pigeon, were more independent, but equally enthusiastic. They live in history for their crossing in 1869 of the formidable Sesiajoch<sup>13</sup> from the Riffel to Alagna in mistake for the easy Lysjoch with a second-rate guide and a contemptible porter, when the elder sister saved a demoralised party by her skill and courage as anchorman on the unknown descent. Years later they recorded that in days gone by many A.C.s would not speak to them, though no one was so impertinent as the 'King of the Riffel'! In fact women had to be very determined, to persevere against male disapproval. Mrs. Aubrey le Blond says of this period: 'I had to struggle hard for my freedom. My great-aunt, Lady Bentinck, wrote to my mother, Stop her climbing mountains; she is scandalising all London and looks like a Red Indian.' Another was Miss Straton, the heiress, who won fame by the first winter ascent of Mont Blanc in 1876, married her guide and became Mme. Charlet-Straton. Of the same sex was Coolidge's dog Tschingel, who between 1868 and 1876 accompanied her master on no fewer than fifty-five 'Grandes Courses', including nine 4,000 m. peaks, never made a false step and rarely needed assistance. She was not however exactly popular in mountain huts and was ungallantly described by the anglophobe Swiss, Weilenmann, as a 'formloser, watscheliger Fettklumpen'.<sup>14</sup>

Again and again throughout the period the protagonists of the sport lament the approaching exhaustion of the Alps. For instance in 1875 Leslie Stephen asserts<sup>15</sup>: 'The number of unaccomplished feats may be reckoned on the fingers, and when we have lost half a dozen lives in effecting these few ascents, our destiny will be accomplished.' The only alternative to extinction, the prophets said, was to extend the activities of the Club to ranges further afield. The idea fell on fruitful

<sup>13</sup> *A. J.* 5. 367.

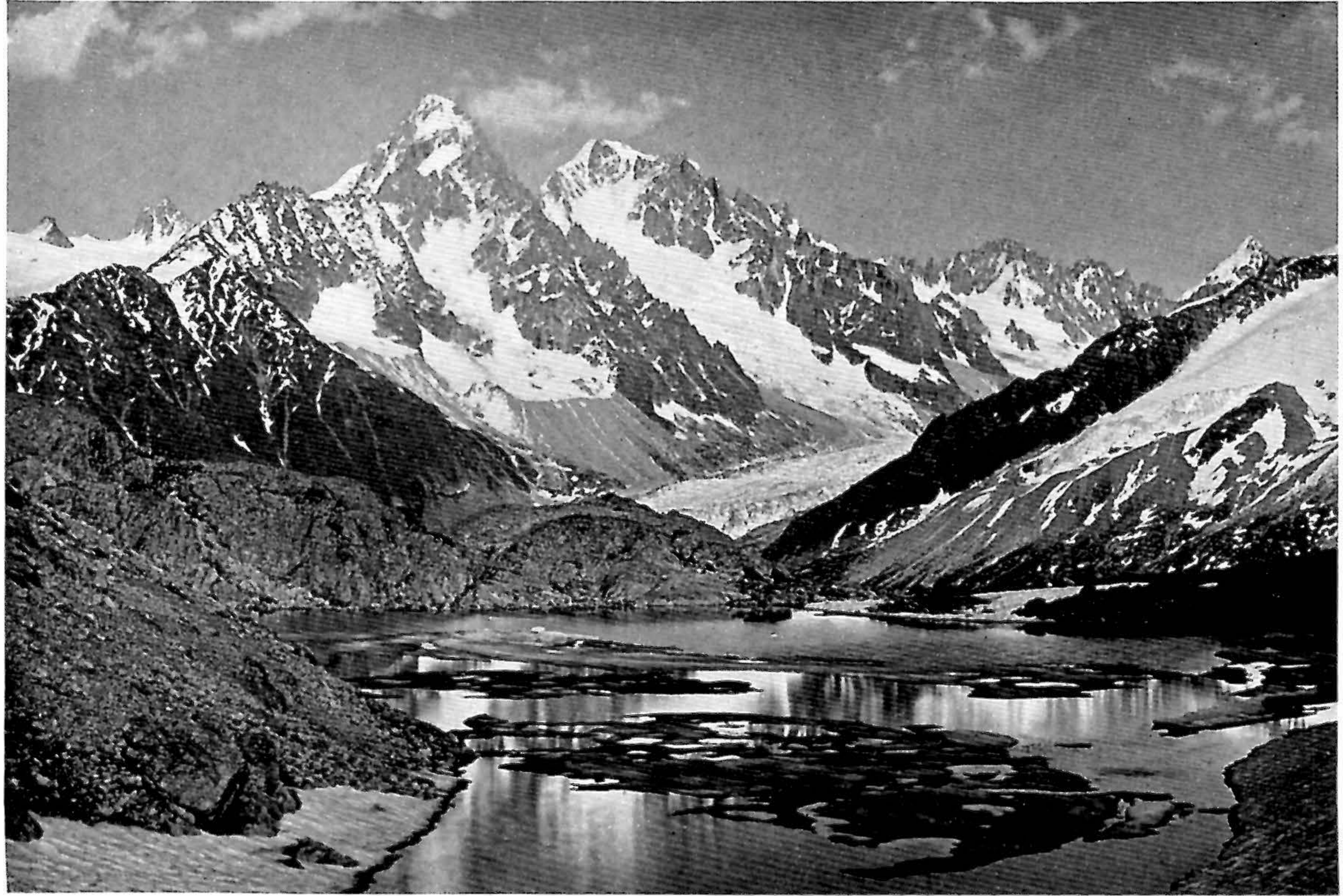
<sup>14</sup> *A. J.* 51. 259.

<sup>15</sup> *A. J.* 7. 312.



*Photo, W. F. Donkin, 1883]*

MONT BLANC. THE NORTHERN SLOPES FROM THE AIGUILLE DU MIDI. THESE, AT LEFT, WERE THE LINE OF SIR JAMES RAMSAY'S 1855 ROUTE FROM THE COL DU GÉANT.



*Photo, Sydney Spencer, 1895]*

AIGUILLES DU CHARDONNET AND D'ARGENTIÈRE FROM THE LAC BLANC.

soil, and the obvious first choice was the unknown Caucasus. Moore, Freshfield and Tucker in 1868 formed the spearhead, which was driven a little further home in 1874 by Moore, Walker, Gardiner and Grove. Neither expedition achieved anything of note beyond the ascent of the highest peak, Elbruz. But they saw enough to realise the possibilities of the new playground and to whet and stimulate the appetite for more. They also introduced the practice of taking their favourite alpine guides abroad with them, a practice which in the years to come was to pay high dividends all over the world. In 1872 W. C. Slingsby started his Norwegian career: one of the highlights of it was his legendary first ascent of Skagastølstind in 1876, when, deserted by his companions, he tackled the last 500 ft. of rock alone, and won. In the Pyrenees, Charles Packe and Count Henri Russell were indefatigable pioneers. Further afield the great peaks of the Himalayas still slumbered in peace, but the Pundits, disguised as pilgrims or Lamas or traders and taking their lives in their hands, were infiltrating up the valleys and recording as best they could measurements for the great survey of India, the most striking of their exploits being the first circuit of the Everest group by No. 9 Pundit, Hari Ram, in 1871. Some years earlier W. H. Johnson had reached heights well exceeding 20,000 ft. in the course of setting up his plane-table. In the Southern Alps of New Zealand little had been done beyond naming the chief peaks and glaciers, but in 1873 the Governor, Sir George Bowen, suggested<sup>16</sup> to the Alpine Club that Mt. Cook was an object worthy of their attention, and offered official aid to any members of the Club who would 'devote their courage, skill and experience to the exploration of the New Zealand Alps', an offer accepted eight years later by the Rev. W. S. Green. In the United States, according to Mr. Farquhar's records, 32 peaks of note were first climbed between 1866 and 1879, of which 14 exceeded 14,000 ft., the most familiar being Mt. Rainier, ascended by General Stevens and P. B. Van Trump in 1870: in 1878 James Eccles took his inseparable companion, Michel Payot, to explore the Rockies in Wyoming and Idaho. Whymper, having renounced the Alps after five unforgettable years of triumph and disaster, satisfied his scientific tastes by visits to Greenland in 1867 and 1872; and in 1879 enlisted the two Carrels of Val Tournanche for an ambitious and successful attack on the Andes of the Equator, resulting in the conquest of Chimborazo (20,545 ft.) and the collection of a mass of scientific material, not made easier by the discovery that the Andean mule, indispensable for transport, has its worst passions aroused by mercurial barometers, cameras and other delicate instruments. The most fascinating feat of the period, if it had only been true, was the reputed discovery and partial ascent of a mountain in New Guinea, Mt. Hercules,

<sup>16</sup> *A. J.* 6. 364.

AN ALPINE DAY

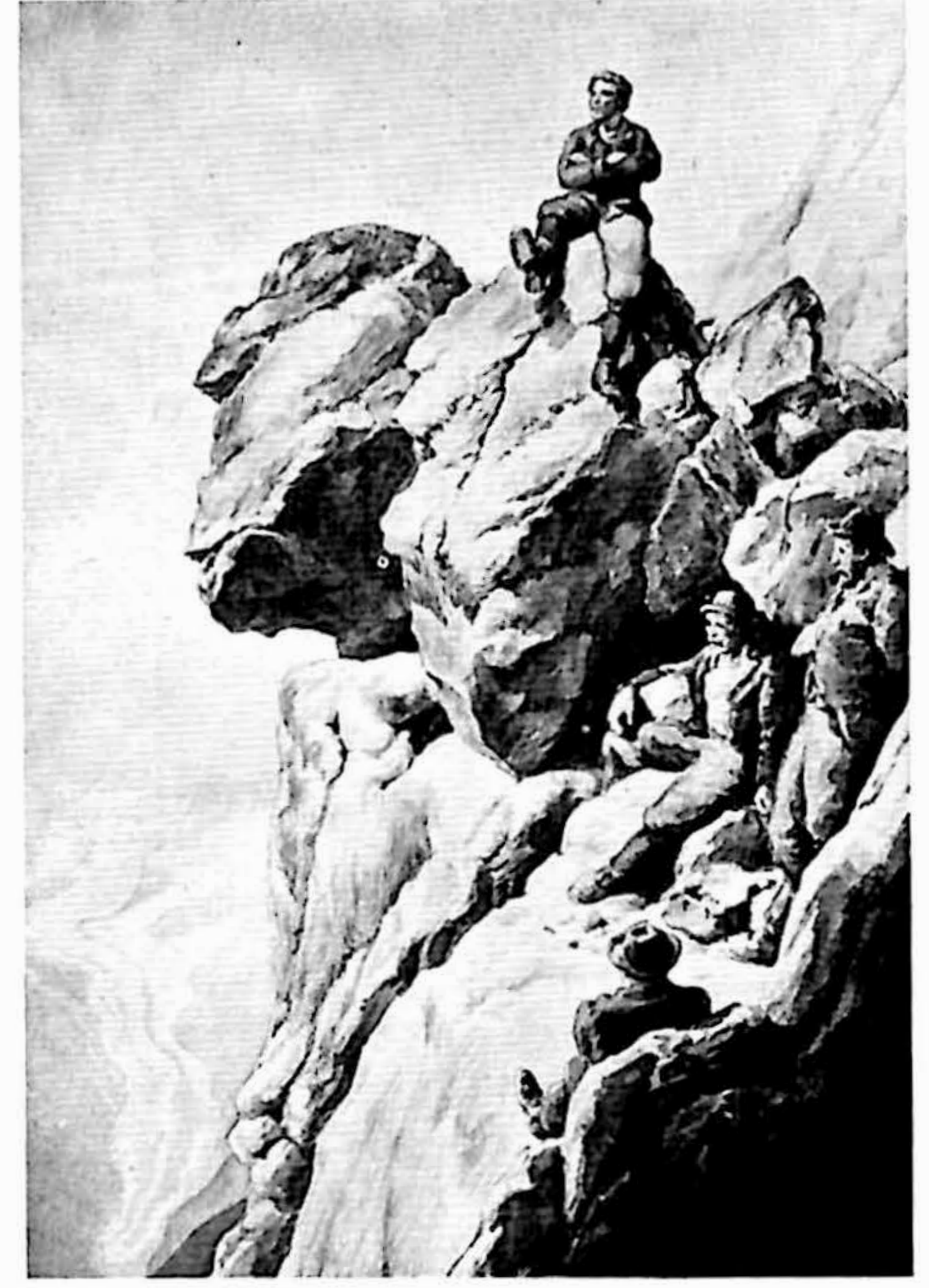


THE CHALET.



BETWEEN THE LIGHTS.

(From sketches by H. G. Willink, 1882.)



ON THE MOUNTAIN.

32,783 ft. in height, by a certain Capt. Lawson in 1875.<sup>17</sup> From a base at 2,000 ft. he claimed to have reached a height of 25,314 ft., ascending 12,000 ft. in the first five hours and 11,200 ft. in the next four, though laden with arms and blankets and meeting every kind of physical obstruction, of which lack of oxygen was one of the least, his only assistant a native dwarf. Despite his claim to be taken seriously, the Alpine Club remained unimpressed!

The equipment of the time was still primitive by modern standards. There was a great variety of ice-axes and much discussion about their rival merits. The alpenstock was far from obsolete: even on the first ascent of the Brenva route the four amateurs all carried them, only the guides having axes, less cumbersome probably than Franz Andermatten's favourite weapon, of which Dent writes<sup>18</sup>: 'It was the most portentous ice-axe I ever saw, an instrument of an unwieldy character resembling a labourer's pick on the top of a Maypole; its dimensions were monstrous and its weight preposterous.' The clumsy haversack was gradually giving way to an early form of rucksack. Buckingham came on the scene with the first rope specially built to resist a sudden shock. Whymper devised efficient tents and sleeping-bags, but the bivouac rock and blankets were still the general rule, and in the absence of the folding lantern the early hours had to be endured by the dim light of a candle in a bottle. For special ascents it was still not unusual to carry heavy wooden ladders: we read of them in early attempts on the Charmoz-Grépon, and as a regular feature of Dent's campaign against the Dru: the porter, Bischoff, was hired to carry one on the Silberhorn climb of 1865, and Güssfeldt in 1879 found one imbedded in the ice of the Silberlücke, which he stated to have been there for five years.<sup>19</sup> Artificial aids were rarely used: Whymper's ingenious mind devised a grapnel with which to hook holds out of reach, and iron spikes were sometimes carried: but in general grapnels, claws and crampons were held to be the invention of the devil, though Dent after an analysis of the pros and cons concludes<sup>20</sup>: 'For my part, if it could be proved that by no possible means a given bad passage could be traversed without some such aid, I should not hesitate to adopt any mechanical means to the desired end.' As to clothes, contemporary illustrations show that the ordinary heavy tweeds of the English countryside, slightly adapted to individual taste, were the ordinary wear with stout boots locally hobnailed. There was a definite trend towards better feeding: the days of brown bread and cheese, salted mutton and sour wine as sufficient provision for a long day's climbing were numbered. As hotels improved, so did the commissariat. This no doubt was one of the causes of the distinct rise in the cost of an

<sup>17</sup> *A. J.* 7. 270.

<sup>19</sup> *In den Hochalpen*, p. 180.

<sup>18</sup> *Above the Snowline*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> *Above the Snowline*, p. 228.

Alpine holiday during the 'seventies. Wine in heavy bottles continued to be indispensable, even to a guideless party; Frederick Gardiner's 'special weakness was to leave a bottle of champagne buried in the snow at the foot of a peak to await our return'; Mr. Girdlestone tells an amusing story of the consternation caused by the mistake of a landlord who packed up cognac in the provisions instead of wine, a disastrous mistake especially as there was a lady in the party.

By 1865 the membership of the Alpine Club, founded eight years previously with twenty-nine original members, had risen to 290 and remained at about that figure for some time. In its early years there is no doubt that to be a member of it was justly considered equivalent to holding the blue ribbon of mountaineering. After 1865 there was a dearth of recruits for reasons already suggested, and in the early 'seventies it seems to have suffered from a sort of temporary eclipse from causes now hard to determine. According to the Rev. H. B. George it was A. W. Moore, secretary from 1872 to 1874, who 'nursed it through a dangerous illness tending to atrophy and laid down the main lines on which our society has been conducted ever since his time'. It may well have been due to his tact and energy that the membership by the end of 1879 had leapt up to 432. The Club prospered in its home at St. Martin's Place, but it was still young and did not escape the pains of adolescence. The great Victorians, especially the scientists, thrived on controversy, and the Club had its share of quarrels. The best known is that which arose out of Leslie Stephen's harmless little joke about ozone and his own indifference to its presence or absence on the summit of the Rothorn, a joke which the somewhat humourless Professor Tyndall so strongly resented as a personal affront that he sent in his resignation, only returning to the fold many years later as an honorary member. Hot passions were aroused by the lively paper read to the Club by Thomas Middlemore describing the perils to which he and his guides were exposed during the ascent of the Col des Grandes Jorasses from the Italian side. The greybeards were indignant and said so in no uncertain terms, but Middlemore kept his temper and to the modern mind had the better of the argument. There was an occasional tragedy like the resignation of T. S. Kennedy, almost an original member and very popular, because for the second time a candidate proposed by him had been inexplicably blackballed. But these were minor blemishes confined within the family. In all matters concerning mountains the Club's authority was unchallenged and it had long ceased to be the butt of the Press.

No jealousy can dispute the truth of Bishop Browne's remark in his Presidential address on the occasion of the Jubilee in 1907<sup>21</sup>: 'The Alpine Club may be called the mother of many clubs, the step-mother

<sup>21</sup> *A.J.* 24. 10.

of none.' Between 1862 and 1874 the Austrians, the Swiss, the Italians, the Germans and the French had all successfully founded national clubs. None of them modelled themselves on their parent by requiring a climbing and social qualification from their candidates. Accepting all who professed any kind of interest in mountains, they built up such numerical and financial strength, that they could speedily set to work on their programme of improving maps and tracks and building mountain huts, which did so much to swell the ranks of the mountaineers. The S.A.C., for instance, founded in 1863 and organised into eleven original sections, that same year assisted the Tödi section with funds to build the Grünhorn hut and sponsored the erection of the Mountet, the Weisshorn and the Concordia huts in the 'seventies. Private munificence also helped, Mr. Seiler building the first Matterhorn hut to be erected on the Zermatt side at his own expense in 1868. In 1878 the first International Congress was held in Paris at the invitation of the infant C.A.F. It was followed in 1879 by another at Geneva under the auspices of the S.A.C., at which no fewer than 480 guests sat down to a banquet at the Hotel National, presided over by M. Henri de Saussure. The Alpine Club was represented by C. E. Mathews, its President, and Henri Pasteur, who entertained the whole Congress at his beautiful estate of Grand Sacconnex.

Four books, which have become classics, belong to this period. First and foremost Whymper's immortal *Scrambles amongst the Alps* and Leslie Stephen's *Playground of Europe*, one a thrilling epic of adventure, the other an exquisite apologia for the new pastime which had enthralled so many men of high mental and moral calibre. Stephen was editor of the ALPINE JOURNAL at this time and no review of his book was allowed to appear in its pages! In the same year Tyndall produced his *Hours of Exercise in the Alps*, a collection of articles reassembled from many sources, couched in that peculiarly elaborate phraseology which was natural to him. *The Frosty Caucasus*, by Craufurd Grove (1875), was the forerunner of a host of books, in which Britons have recorded their adventures in distant ranges: it is a record of the difficulties that beset a stranger in a primitive land rather than of mountain adventure. The Alpine Club out of its slender resources financed the production of Adams Reilly's great map of Mont Blanc, the result of years of meticulous surveying by the pupil of Forbes, which set up a new standard of mountain cartography. It issued also the second revised edition of John Ball's monumental *Alpine Guide* in three parts, a work which still has its uses as a reference book today. Best of all it produced the ALPINE JOURNAL. The period is covered by the first nine volumes edited in turn by the Rev. H. B. George, Leslie Stephen and D. W. Freshfield, a most absorbing and exhaustive chronicle of the acts and actors in that Golden Age.



Here are some word-pictures and curious episodes of the time, which are worth resurrecting. First Martin Conway's account of Zermatt<sup>22</sup>: 'The Zermatt of the Seventies was in every way very different from what it afterwards became. It was quite a small place. There were only two hotels that counted, the Mont Cervin for tourists and the Monte Rosa for climbers. Year after year the same group assembled. They were more like a family than a club. A common interest united them. Most were English of one class. The two Seilers were their father and mother. In fine weather we climbed and in bad weather we played billiards on an unlevel table and talked without end. Year by year old members dropped off and were replaced by new: thus the group was continuous with the early pioneers. It remembered Hudson, Whymper, Tyndall and the rest as belonging to themselves. The account of Zermatt and its wall as given in *Scrambles in the Alps* remained still true. The atmosphere of *Scrambles* lingered on. We regarded the high peaks with a respect now long banished.' Martin Conway's ascent of the Matterhorn in 1877 provided an episode more credible in a climbing thriller<sup>23</sup>: 'The guides of the other party arrived on the summit weary, out of temper with their employers and angry with our guides. They said we had detached the stone on purpose to kill them. When they were safely seated, we started down for what proved to be a breathless race. No sooner had we descended a little distance than they began bombarding us with stones and so continued as long as we were in the line of fire. Never did I pass a nastier time on a mountain than during this descent with stones crashing and rattling about us with little intermission.' Dr. Güssfeldt, a young man in 1865, hearing of the tragedy sped hot-foot to Zermatt and did his utmost to induce Peter Taugwalder to lead him up the Matterhorn.<sup>24</sup> 'But he was terrified and strove to dissuade me, showing me the scars which the rope had left on the wrist round which the broken rope had been wound.' They arranged, however, in great secrecy to have a shot at the Italian side and started for it on September 18, but were beaten by the weather. Güssfeldt, unlike some other Continental authors of the time, had pleasing things to say of the English climbers he met<sup>25</sup>: 'The few good guides were in the hands of Englishmen: in those days they spoke no German and I no English, so there was no question of an exchange of ideas between us. That was a pity, for the English pioneers of the time were educated, well-informed people: but the merry German student saw nothing but their check-suits and their well-filled purses.' Clinton Dent had a strange reaction on the summit of the Dru: 'The holiday dream of five years was accomplished. Where in the world will you find a sport able to yield pleasure like this?

<sup>22</sup> *Mountain Memories*, p. 62.

<sup>23</sup> *Mountain Memories*, p. 70.

<sup>24</sup> *In den Hochalpen*, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> *In den Hochalpen*, p. 19.



*Photo, Vittorio Sella]*

THE ZMUTT ARÊTE AND TIEFENMATTEN FACE OF THE MATTERHORN FROM THE COL DES GRANDES MURAILLES.

*On previous page : SOUTH FACE OF THE MATTERHORN (photo, W. F. Donkin, 1885).*

For a second or two—it cannot have been longer—all the past seemed blotted out, all desire of life was lost, and I was seized with an impulse almost uncontrollable to throw myself down the vertical precipices which lay immediately at my feet.’ A truly macabre story is that of Angelo Castagneri, who fell into a bergschrund and was abandoned by his companions.<sup>26</sup> It was a week before anyone went to look for him, and then his father descending into the schrund by a ladder found him still alive. He was carried home on the ladder and some days later was seen by a doctor, who could do nothing for him. His lower legs mortified and dropped off and were buried in the churchyard. Nine months after the accident he was visited by two well-known persons, Count St. Robert and Professor Gastaldi and at last conveyed to a hospital in Turin, where the stumps were successfully healed and a subscription taken up on his behalf. The truth of the whole story is attested by three eminently respectable witnesses, which seems to exclude the possibility of a hoax. Equally hard to believe is the episode<sup>27</sup> of the ‘ingenious and learned member of the Alpine Club, who took out to Chamonix, where he had arranged to meet his guides, two imitation snakes, one yellow, the other green. Several of the best-known guides of the Alps were collected at Couttet’s with their Herren. Under some pretext or other the guides were collected into a group one afternoon and the snakes suddenly produced from the grass. The effect was instantaneous. Men who were fearless on a mountain were terrified at a coloured toy from the Baker St. bazaar. . . . The excitement produced by the snakes was so great that no other subject could be discussed by the guides then at Chamonix, and the next day one of their number came, representing the rest, to ask that the snakes should be conveyed to Zermatt, for they all agreed that Imboden himself could not stand up against them.’

Leslie Stephen, when reviewing *Scrambles amongst the Alps*, remarked that ‘Some of us find it rather melancholy to look back upon the good old days when a mountain was a mountain still and a man made his will before going up Mont Blanc’. He was even more depressed, when he reflected on the inevitable collapse of the Club when the last first ascent had been made and its *raison d’être* vanished. But there were optimists as well. C. E. Mathews, reviewing the growth of mountaineering in 1881, could say: ‘We look forward with confidence to the future. Whatever is doubtful, the one thing is certain, that mountaineering will never cease to be a genuine sport for Englishmen. Men of wealth or of leisure, or in pursuit of some scientific object, will as the years go on investigate great mountain ranges as yet unknown or unexplored. . . . We have created a new sport for Englishmen. Upon you will rest the responsibility that the future of mountaineering shall be worthy of

<sup>26</sup> *A.J.* 4. 61.

<sup>27</sup> *Pioneers of the Alps*, p. 99.

its present and its past.' Clinton Dent shared his confidence : ' English folk may find it hard to hold their own against their near relations in athletic pursuits such as cricket and sculling, but in mountaineering they undoubtedly lead and will continue to do so. . . . After all a century hence the mountaineering centres of today will perhaps still attract as they do now. It may be possible to get to Chamonix without submitting to the elaborately devised discomfort of the Channel passage and without the terrors of asphyxiation in the carriages of the Chemin du Fer du Nord.' A bold reviewer of a book of Himalayan travel in 1875 had a blissful dream of the future of the Club : ' The day will undoubtedly arrive when mountain-climbing will extend to the Himalaya, and our Club will have sections at Simla and Calcutta. English climbers will do well to reflect that Simla is now only  $3\frac{1}{2}$  days from Bombay or 3 weeks from England. But it is to Anglo-Indians that we look with hope for Mountaineering in the Himalaya.' The question of Everest was already emerging. Craufurd Grove discussing<sup>28</sup> his party's experience of rarefied air on Elbruz in 1874 concludes : ' It may be taken for granted that no human being could walk to the top of Everest.' M. Paul Bert, however, writing in the *Annuaire du C.A.F.* of the same year, assured his readers,<sup>29</sup> that his experiments proved that by carrying with them a bag of oxygen instead of a bottle of champagne they could defy their old enemy, *mal de montagne*, and arrive with comparative ease on the summit of Everest. Everest has now been ascended, with oxygen but hardly with comparative ease. Is it too fanciful to suppose that the human frame may yet further adapt itself to extreme height and disprove Mr. Grove's axiom by achieving the summit without oxygen, always assuming that mankind has not meantime misused the rival gas, hydrogen, to reduce Mt. Everest to rubble ?

<sup>28</sup> *Frosty Caucasus*, p. 236.

<sup>29</sup> *A.J.* 7. 343.