

An American Reascends Mont Blanc

(GEORGE W. HEARD, JR., 1857)

The story of the author's ascent of Mont Blanc in 1855 having already been presented in these pages (*A. A. J.*, iii, 172), we now print for the first time the account of his second ascent two years later, made in company of his brother Augustine.

In his copy of Venance Payot's *Guide-Itinéraire au Mont Blanc* (1857), now in the Club's possession, George Heard entered a note stating that he crossed the Col des Français (?Fenêtre du Tour) on July 12th, 1856, with K. A. Chapman, his companion on Mont Blanc in 1855, and the guides Cachat and Couttet. In his book he also indicates that, in addition to his two ascents of Mont Blanc, he had climbed the Buet, Dent du Midi, Jardin and Col du Géant. Of his Mont Blanc ascent in 1855 he says that they took 6.5 hours from Chamonix to the Grands Mulets, and seven hours thence to the summit.

George Heard, therefore, should be remembered as one of the most enterprising mountaineers of his time among our countrymen, and it is fitting that the present narrative should close our survey of early American activity in the Alps.—*Ed.*

A^N *Ascent of Mont Blanc, on the 4th & 5th September 1857.*

My brother Augustine & myself had been travelling for a month together over some of the finest parts of Lombardy and Piedmont. We had visited Milan, Venice, Verona, Genoa, Turin and many other of the finest northern Italian cities; at length in the course of our wanderings we found ourselves in the Hôtel Royale in the little village of Chamonix, at the foot of Mont Blanc. It was my ninth visit to the valley, & I had been so much charmed with my former trips that I was unwilling to forego the pleasure of introducing my brother to this grandest of all mountain scenery.

We visited, after the custom of nearly all tourists, the Flégère, the Chapeau, the Montanvert, & continued our excursion even as far as the Jardin, where the greenest and softest grass, & the most luxuriant rhododendrons grow in close proximity to, nay, in the very center of, a sea of ice, contrasting most forcibly the extremes of summer and the depth of winter.

The following day we visited the Brevent, situated directly in front of the Mont Blanc. The day was charming; every peak & asperity of the noble & imposing mountain confronted us with its "full-faced visage"; and as we gazed on its magnificent glaciers streaming down into the valley below us, reminiscences of my first ascent crowded into my mind, & I could not repress the irresistible longings that came over me to explore again its mysterious

& hidden recesses. My brother seemed to feel the fascination of the scene as much as myself, & we then first spoke seriously of attempting the ascent of Mt. Blanc. We descended to the Hôtel without having come to any definite decision on the matter. Our guide Jean Couttet urged it strongly, & was ready with any amount of protestations as to our ability to succeed, "si ces messieurs voulaient seulement l'essayer" ("if these gentlemen were only willing to try").

Just as we arrived at Chamonix, a party of two gentlemen¹ with their guides reached the village from a most successful ascent of the mountain, & their glowing account of their expedition completely fixed our determination to go. We gave orders for the necessary guides and provisions.

The weather early the following morning was bright and cloudless, so the provisions were packed away in the knapsacks & all the preparations were finished for the start, about 8 o'clock, however, a few light fleecy clouds came floating through the sky & caught against the lofty summits that hem in the valley; they began to increase & descend slowly into the plain. We paid but little attention to them although some of the guides shook their heads & held up their hands to *feel* the wind. About 9 A.M. we bid goodbye to all our friends who were assembled in the Square before the Hôtel to witness our departure, & we moved slowly out of the village loaded with all the appurtenances of the route. We had a goodly escort: there were eight guides, each of whom had his porter; then there was a volunteer who had heard of our good auspices & wished to join us—Augustine & myself made 19. The names were: Augustine Heard Jr., George W. Heard Jr. Guides: Jean Couttet, François Couttet, Joseph Pacard, Michel Pacard, Jean Simond, Auguste Frasserand, Alphonse Davouassoux, volunteer; Auguste Davouassoux; eight porters.

We made a very good appearance as we defiled down the narrow lane that led from the village to the cultivated fields that lay at the base of the Aiguilles, but "l'homme propose et Dieu dispose." We had not proceeded more than an hour from Chamonix ere "a change came o'er the spirit of our dream." The clouds had been gradually but steadily increasing, & were soon driving up the

¹ Alfred Wills and Cecil Russell, August 30th, 1857.

valley before a furious wind. We turned & hurried back "helter-skelter" to the village we had left so proudly an hour before, & got "wringing" wet before we reached a friendly barn, where we took shelter. It continued raining heavily all day—as if indeed the very windows of the heavens were opened, & so ended the first day of our ascent of Mont Blanc!

The next day was dull, gloomy & lowering; the sky was covered with dull lead-colored clouds that effectually put a damper on all our merriment: laughs subsided into smiles, smiles soon became ghastly grins, as we sauntered through the streets of the little village during the intervals between showers, & we felt like devouring our very souls as we flattened our noses against the window panes of the hotel in turning our gaze wistfully upwards in hopes of seeing a break in the gray mantle of clouds that lay spread out above us. Guides were consulted: they all had the same opinion—that it would be fine weather "d'abord" (presently), if we only had the patience to wait for it. "Voyez-vous, messieurs," "la bise commence à reprendre & voilà de petite nuages qui commencent à pousser contre le vent du midi", said they ("See, sirs, the North wind is beginning to come back & there are some little clouds beginning to push against the South wind"): So we did wait with the patience of Job, but the weather still remained the same. We turned in after leaving orders in the May day style to—"if you are waking, call us early, call us early, mother dear"—should the weather prove to be fine. But, alas! we awaken in the morning by the rain pattering against the windows, & the rattling of the casement by the wind. The storm had not abated; dark murky clouds filled the sky, & our view was limited to the "rocky munitions" around the valley, the summits of which even were invisible. About noon it looked like clearing up & tired of our long sojourn at Chamonix we thought we would push on & try to gain the Grands Mulets that night. But just as we were eating a hearty luncheon before our start, we were delightfully disappointed to see the rain pour down with a fury that had seldom been equalled since the days of Noah. "How refreshing this must be to the land", thought we, "to the parched & thirsty ground!" We determined to forego our ascent & go on to Martigny the next day if the weather was not propitious enough the following morning to enable us to start.

At four A.M. the sky was cloudless! Our provisions of the first day were almost entirely spoiled by the rain so we ordered new supplies: the knapsacks were all repacked & everything was got ready for the start. At eight o'clock it seemed almost an even chance whether it would be fine or not. However, we determined to set out, & try our luck again; so about 9 A.M. we left Chamonix with the best wishes of our friends & a motley crowd of tourists, guides, women & children.

Our route lay as usual through the green meadows nearly to the lower part of the Glacier des Bossons, then turning to the left we ascended the steep grassy pasturages below the dark band of mountain firs that lay between us & the desolate regions of snow & ice above. Although often seen & observed before, yet no less striking was the contrast between the summer verdure of the valley below and the gradually but continually decreasing luxuriance of the vegetation as we toiled upwards. On emerging from the forest of firs we advanced over the dry pasturages, where a few stray goats were browsing on the scanty herbs; they raised their heads & looked inquiringly at us, as though they were not accustomed to the intrusion of strangers on their domains, where for only about three or four weeks of the year *they* could find a precarious existence. Everything at this elevation bore marks of a tardy climate: little flowers that are the first to appear in the more genial temperature of the vallies after the winter's snow, were here just pushing through the ground; the torrents & rivulets that came rushing down from the heights above were icy cold; and as we stopped a moment to look upon the view opening around us, the cool breeze from the glaciers announced to us plainly enough that we were encroaching upon their domains.

We arrived safely at the "Pierre à l'Échelle" at the base of the Aiguille du Midi. I have already spoken of this rock in my letter of my previous ascent in 1855, as being the spot where a ladder is always kept, & where parties always stop for the first meal, the "Déjeuner" as they call it, after leaving Chamonix. Knapsacks were thrown off,—mutton, beef, chickens, bread and cheese are handed round & readily accepted: Kegs of wine are put on tap, and a bottle of brandy, as it passes from hand to hand is soon emptied by a series of *sips* to the success of the enterprise. We rested here nearly an hour, & then got ready to cross the "Glacier des Bossons." The weather was neither good nor bad, "but about

middling", like Patrick's "drame"; and we hoped to arrive at the "Grands Mulets" without any serious difficulty. The passage over the Moraine to get on the Glacier was not easy to find; the ice was soft & brittle from the rains of the previous day, & it was some time before we found ourselves in the "beau milieu", real centre, of the ice. The crevasses were sometimes awkward customers and gave us some trouble. However, with care & attention we got along pretty well; the ladder proved of much service, as in throwing it across a crevasse we would walk across on the rounds of it. At one time the ice broke under one end of it, just when a porter (Bellamy), was in the middle, & it "tilted up!" Bellamy would have gone to the bottom had not Frasserand (a guide) seized him & drawn him back.

We had several quite exciting adventures in crossing this Glacier which would take too much time to relate, & I must hasten on. Some of the crevasses were superb:—it was exceedingly fascinating to stand on their brink, and look down into their blue & silent depths—they were so beautiful in colour, & so "calm in their majesty"!

We arrived at the Grands Mulets at about 4 P.M., as nearly as I can recollect. Our porters were refreshed with as much as they could eat & drink, & after wishing us "bon voyage" they started off on their return march to Chamonix. We watched their progress on the glacier we had just left until a turn concealed them from our view, & then we began our preparations for passing a few hours as comfortably as possible. A fire was kindled inside the little hut with the faggots & dry wood we had carried up with us, & a soup was soon boiling in a small iron pot that was made to do every duty. That wonderful pot!!—Everything was made in it;—tea, coffee, soup, an omelette, snow melted for drinking, wine was mulled in it, & Gus and myself washed in it the following morning! If we had known to what varied purposes the pot was put, perhaps our soup and coffee would not have tasted so good, but our appetites were so sharpened by our walk in the keen mountain air that we had few faults to find with the cooking or the utensils. To use a homely saying, "all was fish that came to our net."

I am sorry I have no magnificent sunset to record; no rosy and variegated hues of the dying dolphin that swept up the noble glaciers from the vallies below to expatiate upon;—no wonderful

transition from the full glare of day to the soft evening twilight to relate—the eye resting upon the snowy heights arrayed in all the gorgeous colours of an unclouded Alpine sunset. Alas! no! *Our* sun sank into a bank of thick clouds that crowned the far-distant Jura; the valley of Chamonix at our feet was filled with dark vapour; ever and anon we were enveloped in the clouds ourselves, & every puff of wind blew cold & damp in our faces like a November gust on the sea-side. But if the weather was so unpropitious outside, we atoned for it, within the little hut. We told jolly stories, and sang jolly songs, & laughed in our jolliest manner. In our “*Vin de St. George*” & our “*Vin de St. Jean*”, we drank to the health of every known potentate on earth, & of a good many others not mentioned in the “*Almanach Gotha*”. Then our guides sang *us* the “*Marseillaise Hymn*”, & a song to “*Victory*”, in patois: and Gus and myself favored *them* with “*Old Dog Tray*”, “*Wait for the Wagon*” & “*Yankee Doodle*”—all of which we sang to the same tune, & which tune no one knew but ourselves, & *we* couldn’t do it the second time. Then we all sang “*Le Bon Roi Dagobert*” & the “*Sire de Franc-Boisy*” together, & then we lay down on the floor & went to sleep—that is, the guides went to sleep & made such a tremendous noise in snoring, that we couldn’t even hear the avalanches outside; & everybody knows on the authority of “*Murray’s Handbook*” that avalanches are one of the entertainments of those who pass a night at the “*Grands Mulets*.”

We passed rather an uncomfortable night, and at one o’clock in the morning we had breakfasted & were ready to start. As we put our noses outside the door, & felt the cold wind, & thought of the many hours of toil before us, we did not feel very enthusiastic; our quarters in the hut, bad as they were, seemed a palace of luxury in comparison with what we were to encounter! The clouds hung heavily around the lofty summits, & our guides shook their heads more than once as they gazed upwards—at half past one it looked like rain, but a quarter of an hour afterwards a guide invited us to look out. There was not a cloud in the sky! A bright & nearly full moon shone with unwonted brilliancy over the snow white glaciers, which streamed down on every side around us, & enabling us to discern every crevasse & irregularity of their form and lighted up every outline of the dark crags of the *Aiguille du Midi* on the left as clearly as the noonday! The effect was wonderful.

At 2 o'clk we clambered carefully down from our hut on the rock of the Grands Mulets to the glacier below, where we attached ourselves all together with ropes. We had not advanced more than 100 yards from the Grands Mulets when we sank through the outer crust of snow nearly up to our knees, and continued to do so at every step until we reached the summit. This made the walking a thousand times more laborious & fatiguing, as can easily be imagined.

We skirted along the immense banks of snow, mounting slowly in zigzags, now turning to the right, now to the left to shun a yawning crevasse, whose dangers could be easily seen in the bright moonlight. We marched along in single file, each one taking care to place his feet in the tracks made by his predecessor & every once in a while we changed the man who was the head one of the file, as the labour of "making the steps" was too great to be continued long without relief. It was very cold, yet the action of walking kept us warm enough. I suffered much, however, from my feet, which were like two icicles. We wore thick wolf skin gloves on our hands which effectually protected them from the cold. This forced night's march, though as vivid to my mind as though it happened yesterday presented nothing of any material interest for the first two hours after our departure from the Grands Mulets. Crevasses we had, & dangerous ones too, to cross & to avoid; hard scrambles up the faces of steep slopes of snow & ice followed each other in rapid succession; yet we met no obstacle that required more than ordinary nerve to surmount until we arrived at a place called the "Coin du Dôme", right under the shadow of the great "Dôme du Gôte". At this point a most enormous & formidable crevasse stretched along the whole width of the glacier. It seemed impossible to cross. The guides separated & searched on all sides for a passage: there was but one point by which it was possible to gain the other side, & this was so dangerous that a consultation was held as to whether it was worth the while to risk it. The crevasse was 15 or 20 feet wide in the narrowest part & across this a natural bridge of snow about 2 feet wide had formed which had sunk three or four feet below the level of the two lips of the crevasse: it was necessary to cross on this bridge. We all got together on the brink of the crevasse, & attaching three ropes to François Couttet, who volunteered to go ahead, we lowered him gradually & softly down on the bridge: it bore him & we eased out the rope inch by inch to

him as he moved slowly forward. He tested every step before advancing with a punch from his pole; he found it stronger than we imagined, but we did not breathe freely till we saw him on the other side. Then Frasserand (a guide) followed him with the same precautions—then went Auguste Davouassoux, the volunteer. Just as we were intent on the passage of this crevasse, the weather changed with the inconceivable rapidity of these high latitudes, as three of our party were on the farther side, & removed from us but about 20 feet, a cloud enveloped us in such a fog, that we could not even distinguish them, though they had a large lantern in which were burning *three candles*. The snow fell in such quantities that we were soon as white as millers, & we did not dare to move for fear of falling, & attached as we all were one to another we should have dragged each other into the crevasse. It was in standing still in this awkward position that my feet became intensely cold, & as I found when I got back they were quite severely frostbitten. Two of the guides drummed on them with their fists to keep up the circulation, but I found the manipulation so severe that I thought the remedy worse than the disease.

We were at least three quarters of an hour standing there, & were all benumbed with cold & wet, when it became suddenly a little clearer, & looking up we saw the clouds driving away, & dissipating like thin smoke, the moon shining down through them, silvering the snow & gladdening our hearts.

We now addressed ourselves again to our onward progress. It was for Gus & myself to pass the crevasse. Ropes were attached to us; one passed under each arm & thrown across to the party on the further side, & we were let down on the bridge as lightly as a mother spreads a covering on a baby to prevent its waking. We moved slowly across, placing our feet exactly in the tracks of those who went before us; & on our reaching the further side, a powerful arm stretched down & seizing us by the coat collar lifted us up clear & placed us by the side of the others! The others followed in their turn, & so it came to pass that we all crossed safely over.

Mounting then a little Plateau we had another steep climb, & again found ourselves in a thick fog—not so thick, however, that the guides could not discern the true route. But the fatigue from the severe labour of walking in the deep snow—we sank in up to our knees at every step & often above them—was very evident in

the man who went ahead, "to break out" a path: it was necessary to *relay* him very often. All this new snow had fallen during the last few days, when we were detained at Chamonix by the bad weather. It was rain at Chamonix, but became light snow on the heights.

Daylight had already broken some time before we attained the entrance to the "Petit Plateau", which lies between the "Dôme du Gôte" & the highest part of the "Glacier des Bossons". Its surface was covered with huge *débris* of fallen avalanches, pieces that weighed hundreds of tons were scattered about in every direction. As we picked our way silently through them, how anxiously we looked up! All along the summit of the vast Dôme du Gôte stretched a long line of snow & ice cornices, *seemingly* all detached & in the act of falling. It is said that even the vibration of a whisper may sometimes bring them down! How carefully we walked! How we all refrained from any loud noise as we passed under their dread shadow! The fog of clouds as they whirled about hid them often from our view, but the indistinctness added much to their terrible appearance. I think it is here that lies all, or by far the greatest danger in the Ascent of Mont Blanc. The danger arising from the crevasses sinks into insignificance by the skill, energy & courage of the guides (I speak of *really* good guides), when compared with the awful accident that would almost inevitably occur should one of these terrible masses of ice & snow impending over your head give way as you were passing under it. At almost every discharge enough ice is hurled down to sweep away whole forests & destroy whole villages.

On this Petit Plateau I noticed a phenomenon I have never seen satisfactorily explained. At the bottom of every footstep the snow was of a bright clear blue, as deep as the color of the sky in a cloudless day in summer. It was the same blue color that you observe in a crevasse—the peculiar blue "indigo" of the Rhône at Geneva was not more so. I have often noticed this at great heights.

Leaving gladly the Petit Plateau & its danger behind us we gained gradually the entrance of the "Grand Plateau," a huge basin of snow & ice, surrounded on 3 sides by lofty mountains. Before arriving there, however, we had several bad crevasses to cross: I will not dwell upon them; crossing one was much like crossing another, & it's difficult to understand descriptions without being ac-

quainted with localities. Then came a hard scramble up a steep slope of loose snow two feet deep, with the certainty of falling into an enormous crevasse at the bottom of it in case you slipped, & the Grand Plateau was gained! We sat down in a circle just at the entrance to it, & looked around. On every side was a thick curtain of cloud, & we could see nothing but its uniform gray colour, except once in a while a rent would reveal the rocky crags of the Aiguille du Midi, & the impassable barriers of the "Monts Maudits".

Meat, bread, cheese & wine were produced & handed round, everything that was not absolutely necessary had been left at the Grands Mulets, & we economized all our food. It was now nearly 8 o'clock in the morning! It had taken us 6 hours to reach the Grand Plateau, which we had attained in 3½ hours during my first ascent, so easy had we found the walking *then*, compared with what it was now. The heavy, deep snow made the walking terribly laborious.

A quarter of an hour was allowed for rest, & to eat our breakfast & then it was "En route"! again! The Grand Plateau is quite level, so it was a great relief. We crossed it in turning a little to the left, so to arrive at the only ascent by the "Corridor". We had reached it, & had begun slowly to ascend, when it seemed much clearer & lighter overhead: a quarter of an hour's walk more, & we were above all the clouds in a perfectly serene clear atmosphere, with the sun shining with unwonted lustre in a sky of the clearest & deepest blue!! We were at an absolute height of more than 14,000 feet above the level of the sea, & more than 11,000 above Chamonix. Not a breath of air was stirring, & we could have carried a lighted candle in our hand to the very summit of the mountain without its being extinguished.

We arrived at the bottom of the Mur de la Côte pretty well "done up". Our guides were horribly fatigued & as we looked up the steep precipice of ice before us, the remainder of our enthusiasm began to ooze out at our finger ends. The Mur de la Côte is all one solid mass of ice about 400 feet high, (some call it 550 ft.) & it is nearly perpendicular! It is bordered on the left by an enormous & unfathomable crevasse, whose yawning mouth seemed ready & capacious enough to swallow up our whole party. It gave us pleasant intimation of where we should bring up in case of slipping on its white glistening surface.

After a few minutes halt at its base to collect our strength & courage, Jean Couttet, our chief guide, cried out, "Allons, Messieurs, en avant!" First one guide took the axe & after great labour cut ten or twelve steps; he was unable to cut any more, passed the axe to another; then *he* tried, & cut about a many & then gave it up perfectly exhausted; then François Couttet, to whom I have before alluded as being one of the strongest & most courageous guides of Chamonix, took the axe & cut all the rest of the steps clean to the top of this awful precipice. An idea may be better formed of its height, & the strength & endurance necessary to make the steps when I state that from the bottom to the top 552 steps were cut, & that each one had to be hewed out of the hard solid ice! And this too in an atmosphere so rarified that several of our guides were sick, & after a walk of 8 or 10 hours up hill, in the snow knee deep. Of course the steps were made in zigzag. The inclination of the Mur de la Côte is about 70°.

On arriving at the top of the Mur de la Côte we all threw ourselves down on the snow, & got a short rest. A second breakfast was made here, & a bottle of Champagne was drunk to the health of his August Majesty the Mont Blanc, we all standing up bare-headed in the full presence of the "Mountain Monarch."

We had now the "Calotte" to ascend when we should have gained the destination of our longings. But how distant the summit seemed! We had crawled like ants for hours & hours upon the huge side, toiling upward through mist & cloud until the blue of heaven seemed just above us, so near that we could apparently touch it, still we mounted & mounted in the snow & ice, over yawning crevasses, up terrible precipices—& when we thought the last icy barrier passed & that we had but a step to take to stand upon the white glistening Dome—behold another long steep, laborious ascent of a thousand feet ere we could be admitted into the Royal presence of the "Monarch of Mountains". How interminably long the ascent! We had much difficulty to keep awake; we were obliged to stop every ten or twenty steps to take breath, so great was the rarefaction of the air. I suffered from a most intense headache, but my brother was free from any bad feeling whatever, & in fact he was well during the whole ascent as any of the guides, & stood it quite as well. Our guides were throwing themselves down every few steps in sheer exhaustion, & going to sleep. I had

forgotten to say that we had left three of them done up completely on the top of the Mur de la Côte. "Si le Mont Blanc avait seulement 500 pieds de plus, il n'y a qui mon frère & moi & qui suissons arriver au sommet"—said Couttet (Jean), ("If the Mont Blanc was only 500 feet higher my brother & myself would be the only ones to reach the top"), & I believe it. But there is an end to everything, & luckily there was to this last ascent. We neared the top: the guides stood still & Gus & myself went ahead, hand in hand, crossed the ridge & the Mont Blanc was gained! Our shadows fell *down* directly on the highest point of Europe. There was nothing *above* us but the brilliant sun shining in a sky most intense blue, the moment of victory was a proud one!

Around and below us we looked upon a boiling sea of cloud that rolled in huge billows, against the snowy pinnacle on which we stood. It was indeed an impressive scene; the most utter silence reigned, only broken at long intervals by the dull roll of an unseen avalanche in the mist below us: not a thing in nature reminded us of life—we seemed to be left entirely alone, so far *above* not *in*, the world that we had lost all interest in it. The cold bleak summit of glistening snow seemed in its solitude to be a throne for the gods—"holy ground", in fact.

The clouds covered all the country as far as we could see. Here & there a lofty granite summit reared its head above them, like black rocks amidst the white breakers of an ocean. Ever & anon the clouds in one vast surge would sweep over them & hide them from our view; then retiring as suddenly they left little particles of the white vapour adhering to their jagged sides, as if they were flecked with foam from the sea. In this manner we saw the Aiguilles Verte, de Géant, d'Argentiére & les Grandes Jorasses.

The masses of cloud were driving in all directions with furious rapidity. Away down on our Northern horizon a bank of dark vapour was hurrying to the East; & nearer to us was another current moving with equal speed, in the opposite direction. To the South one army of clouds going South-East had met another body coming toward us—& in the conflict huge masses were forced up into the sky far above our heads like a volume of black smoke from a furnace. It reminded me of the passage in Byron's *Manfred*:

"The mists boil up around the glaciers: clouds
"Rise curling far beneath me, white & sulphury,
"Like foam from the roused Ocean of deep Hell."

Monotonous as this view might seem yet it was one full of magnificence and beauty. The bright sun was shining above us so brilliantly that we could scarcely look at the glittering snow on which we were lying, while literally miles below us at Chamonix it was raining with all the violence of the tropics.

We remained on the top about 20 minutes & then giving a "longing lingering look" around us, we began our descent, & what a relief it was to our legs to go down! We slid down the Calotte four abreast, so as to make a large broad track that might be seen from Chamonix, in order that we might have a visible proof of our ascent in case there should be any unbelievers as to the result of our expedition. On arriving at the summit of the Mur de la Côte we resumed an order of march, & we descended this icy precipice with great precaution. The *coming down*, as is often the case, was quite as difficult as the *going up*, & in fact much more so, but we soon stood in safety at its base.

It would be long & tedious to describe our descent to Chamonix minutely. We found the sun extremely hot, in fact it was so intensely hot in crossing the Grand Plateau that our faces were scorched & burnt as red as mahogany. Our eyes suffered terribly from the glare of the sun on the snow. But the clouds soon received us in their embrace, & when we were crossing the Petite Plateau, under the icy cornices I have before alluded to, a heavy snowstorm was found very refreshing!

We had great trouble in crossing the dangerous crevasse I have mentioned before, "au Coin du Dôme". Just as one man was in the middle of it, the bridge suddenly sank a foot or two under him! But thanks to the skill & dexterity of our guides we all passed safely over & soon after arrived at the Grands Mulets. We made a halt there of about half an hour to get a *bite*, & to pack up everything we had left in the morning, & then we recommenced our descent. We found the passage of the Glacier des Bossons very bad, & dangerous from the brittleness & softness of the ice. It had been raining there all day. We only managed to get off of it just at nightfall: & then after a fatiguing descent through the woods in the dark, during which time we lost our way, at about half past nine P.M. we were standing at the bottom of the moun-

tain near the little hamlet of Bossons, where a band of music awaited us. We marched into Chamonix just as the clock was striking ten to the tune of "See the Conquering Hero Comes", with colors flying & drums beating: The Hôtel Royale, where we were staying was illuminated, & everybody in the village,—inhabitants, tourists, men, women & children formed such a dense crowd before the Hotel that we could scarcely get to the door. It had been raining all day & all night at Chamonix, & they wouldn't believe that we had reached the top. However, the next day was fine & cloudless, & when they saw our tracks clear up to the summit the enthusiasm was great!! Our chief guide said he'd never made so difficult an ascent of Mont B., & he had made it 9 times. It was a hard pull—there's no doubt about it—from 2 A.M. until 10 P.M., 20 hours hard walking & mostly (17 hours) in snow knee deep!

And so ended my second ascent of Mt. Blanc.

London, 3rd June '58.