

*Vocation Alpine*, by Armand Charlet. 206 pages, with 13 illustrations and a preface by Dr. Azéma. Neuchâtel and Paris: Victor Attinger, 1949. Price, 450 francs.

Armand Charlet will go down in mountaineering history as the most brilliant guide the valley of Chamonix has produced—a temperamental and exacting taskmaster who (be it said in the same breath) never spared himself. His ancestors were long established at Argentière; many were guides, among them Jean-Estérel Charlet (Charlet-Straton), who gained fame by his first ascent of the Petit Dru in 1879. Much of the talk that Armand heard as a boy he now recalls, delightfully, in early sections of the book. His own father, though not a guide, was a true lover of mountains; he encouraged his sons to climb and often accompanied them.

Youthful adventures in the region adjacent to the Col de Balme and the Aiguilles Rouges were followed by greater expeditions. An ascent of the Tour Noir on a fine day in 1911 was a revelation to Armand: he saw the Matterhorn—while Edward Whymper lay dying in Chamonix. Armand was then twelve years old. Not many years later, Armand and his brother Georges were ski champions of the valley; and in 1919 they made their debuts as professional guides (*aspirants*). But for Armand, who spent two winters with Alpine troops in the Briançon area, the first 4000-m. peak was not (curiously enough) a summit of the Mont Blanc chain, but the Barre des Ecrins.

Although Charlet, like other top-flight guides, made his name on rock, it is not difficult to see that the Aiguille Verte was his own mountain. He made more than 59 ascents, in all seasons and by at least twelve different routes. The notch between the Rocheuse and Aiguille du Jardin is called Col Armand Charlet (3998 m.) on the Vallot map. As his friend Segogne wrote, "It is better to have your name on a col of 4000 m. than on a gendarme of lesser importance."

Of his patrons Charlet says too little. They were chiefly the best members of the G.H.M. Few Americans are mentioned, other than Miss O'Brien and R. L. M. Underhill, whom he guided in the first traverse of the Aiguilles du Diable in 1928. That he regarded this as the culmination of his career is natural, but it is unfortunate that the climax should cut short a book which could have been longer without losing interest.

J. M. T.