

## The Story of Mont Blanc.

By J. E. MUDDOCK, F.R.G.S.

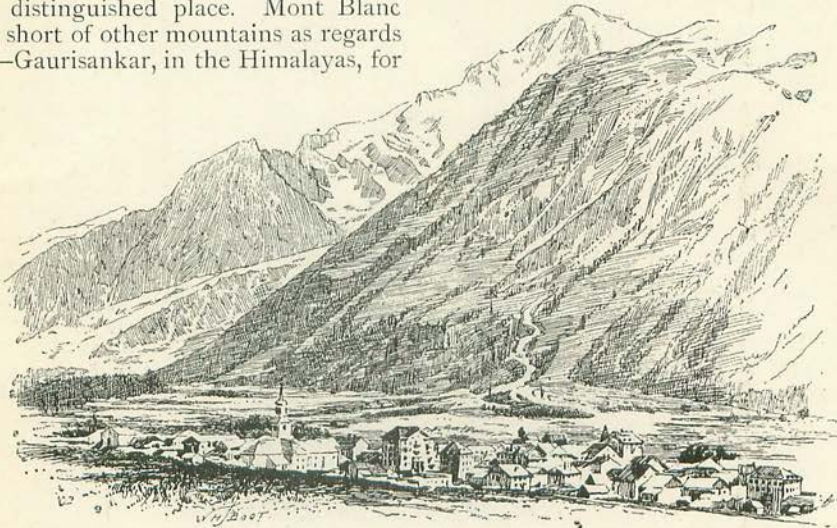
"Mont Blanc is the Monarch of Mountains ;  
They crown'd him long ago  
On a throne of rocks, in a robe of clouds,  
With a diadem of snow."—BYRON.

"Far, far above, piercing the infinite sky,  
Mont Blanc appears—still, snowy, and serene—  
Its subject mountains their unearthly forms  
Pile round it, ice and rock."—SHELLEY.



HERE are higher mountains, and rugged mountains, and mountains more difficult of ascent than Mont Blanc ; but there is never a mountain in the wide world with such a strange story as that which will for all time cling to the "Monarch"—a story that is at once grim, tragic, pathetic, and even comical and absurd ; a story, too, in which love and heroism play a strange part ; and in the annals of science no mountain occupies such a distinguished place. Mont Blanc falls far short of other mountains as regards height—Gaurisankar, in the Himalayas, for

Mont Blanc is known. At what period this name was first bestowed upon it is not very clear. Certainly it was not so called in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In an atlas by Mercator, published in 1595, there is mention of the village of Chamoinix, but Mont Blanc and its satellites are simply referred to under the general term of "Glaciers." One grows dumb as he thinks of the thousands of years, and tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions of years that the mighty dome of eternal snow has dominated the valley where Chamoinix now stands. How small and paltry seem the affairs of man when compared with such an enduring monument of God's handiwork ! As far back as the tenth century we read that a Priory stood at the foot of Mont Blanc.



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instance, being 29,000 ft. But, in spite of this, it has been aptly styled "the Monarch of Mountains," and it well deserves the proud distinction, for it is unique, and proudly soars to the sky—

"In the wild pomp of mountain majesty."

Men and women from all parts of the world have come to pay it homage, and wherever there is civilisation the name of

The valley at that time was wellnigh inaccessible, and for hundreds of years the Priors and holy brothers were undisturbed by the roar of the outer world, which reached not their solitude where the mighty mountain reigned supreme and changed not, though generation after generation of men came from the dust, lived their day, and then went down into the dust again, and in a little while were remembered no



more. Through all these centuries Mont Blanc was regarded as absolutely inaccessible. It was supposed that the cold was so intense that no living thing could possibly exist. It was regarded as a white world of death, whose silence would never be broken by anything save the thundering roar of the avalanche. In 1762, however, there was born in the tiny village of Pellarius, at the foot of the Monarch, one Jacques Balmat, who was destined to break the spell of mystery that had surrounded the mountain from the beginning of time. Balmat's parents were the poorest of peasants, very humble and very ignorant. In their wildest dreams — if they indulged in dreams — they could never have hoped for fame or wealth. But what was wealth to them was to come through their son; and it was ordained that by his great deed the name of Balmat should go down through the ages, and perish not until the mountain itself perishes from the face of the earth. Young Balmat was endowed with all the qualities that are found in the true mountaineer. He had the eye of an eagle, the strength and endurance of a lion, and the dauntless courage of a true man. From an early age he showed a love for the glaciers, and a yearning for the mountains. As he grew in years he displayed a talent for botanising, and in his search for plants he would scale dizzy precipices, while no dweller in the whole of the lovely valley had such an intuitive knowledge where to find the mountain crystals as he had.

Jacques was only a little more than twenty when he began to make excursions on the upper glaciers, and to express a desire to penetrate to Mont Blanc's frozen solitudes. The mountain fascinated him. The more he looked at it the stronger grew the spell. His friends and neighbours told him that it were worse than madness, it was a tempting of Providence to even think of reaching those white regions of ice and

snow. But he was undeterred. That dazzling dome that towered so far up into the thin blue air seemed to invite him to tread its virgin snows, which sometimes looked ghastly in their leaden pallor, and at others glowed with such a glory of rose and crimson that it almost seemed as if a light not of earth but heaven streamed straight down upon them. And at last, unable to withstand the fascination any longer, young Balmat essayed to reach the lofty height on which the stars in their courses sometimes seemed to rest. But his first attempt was a failure, though he was not discouraged. He had in him the stern stuff that makes heroes; and it was death or



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glory with him. A little later, in company with some companions, he made another attempt, and succeeded in getting beyond what is known as the Grand Plateau, but here the courage of the others failed, and they decided to go back. Utterly undaunted, Balmat refused to descend with them, and decided on passing the night in the awful wilderness of snow and ice.

The Grand Plateau is an immense *cirque*,



the bottom almost a level plain of about four acres and a half in extent, and situated 12,000 feet above the level of the sea. It is the playground of avalanches, and the birthplace of whirlwinds. It is a region of deadly cold and ghastly whiteness. When the sun shines on it the glare is blinding; and at night it is weird beyond the power of words to describe. Shelter there is none; and yet, on this plain of eternal snow the intrepid Balmat spent the night. When we think of this man, lost, as it were, in the middle of the vast and unknown solitude, and being well aware that whatever might happen no succour could ever reach him, our admiration for his wonderful courage must be boundless. He was the first human being who ever passed the night in that ice world, and what he suffered is best told in his own words:—

“At last,” he says, “the day began to break. None too soon for me, for I was all but frozen, notwithstanding that I had rubbed myself vigorously, and performed the most ridiculous antics by way of keeping up the circulation. But still I was determined to continue my explorations.”

He had noticed the day previous that a very rapid slope led to a mass of rocks cropping up through the ice, and which from their dark red colour had been named the “Rochers Rouge.” He now decided to endeavour to gain these rocks, being under the impression that from them the summit was perfectly accessible. He found, however, that the slope was solid ice, and in order to maintain his footing he had cut holes with his iron-shod alpenstock. Quoting his own words again he says:—

“It was neither easy nor amusing to be suspended, as it were, upon one leg with a profound abyss below you, and nothing but a species of ice ladder to cling to. But by perseverance I succeeded at last in reaching the Red Rocks.”

His hopes, however, were doomed to disappointment, for between him and the summit which he so eagerly longed to gain was a mighty and steep wall of ice, which it would have been impossible to have mounted without cutting hundreds of steps.

“I was stiff with cold,” he continues, “and nearly dead with fatigue and hunger; and there was nothing for it but to go back. But now I felt certain that when I returned, as return I would, and given fine weather, triumph would be mine.”

So he retraced his steps, and when after

many more hours of peril he regained his humble home he was nearly blind, and scarcely able to move his limbs. He managed to take a little food, however, and then he went to sleep, and did not wake again for forty-eight hours.

He allowed several days to pass, during which he recouped his strength, and kept his plans to himself, and he resolved to scale the mountain again alone, for now he felt absolutely certain that he would succeed in reaching the much coveted goal. But when he came to reflect, it occurred to him that though he did, his story would not be believed. He decided, therefore, to take into his confidence a certain Doctor Paccard, with whom he was acquainted, and who, unlike all the other people in the valley, had not ridiculed his attempts to set his foot on the unsullied, white dome that soared up into the heavens nearly three miles above the sea.

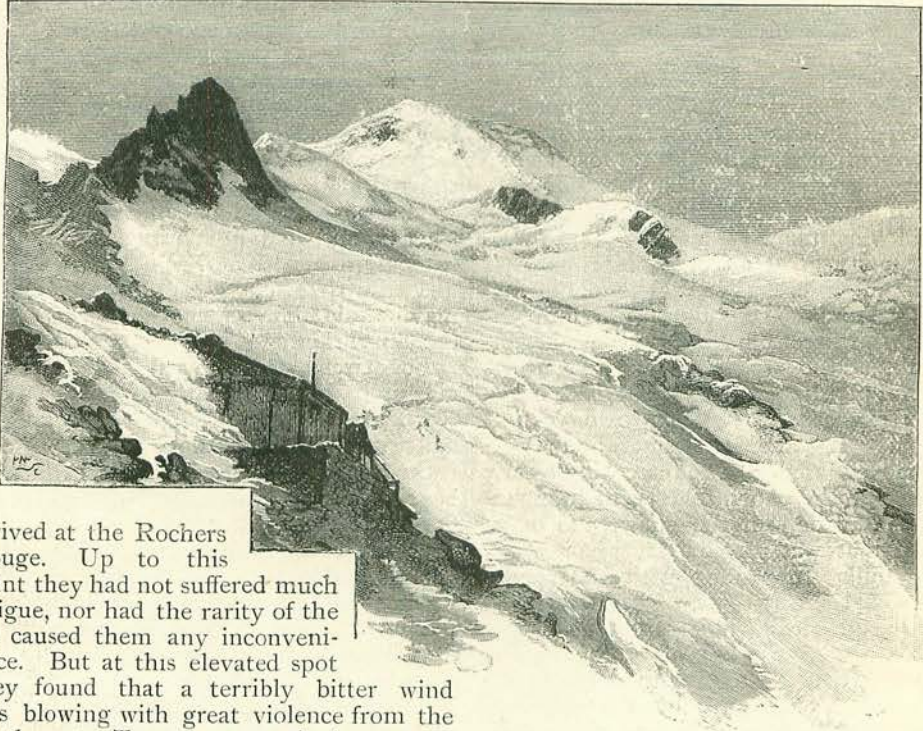
Doctor Paccard had gained considerable reputation in his profession, and was no less distinguished as a naturalist and geologist. He had often said in Balmat's presence that he wished he could gain the summit of Mont Blanc, as from that elevated position he would be able to see with a glance of the eye all the details of the structure of the high peaks that surrounded the giant of the Alps. So to Paccard the indomitable Balmat went, and laid his project before the *savant*, who readily consented to accompany him. Quietly and secretly the two made their preparations. All being ready, they took several other people into their confidence, and asked them to watch the mountain with telescopes, and make known their success if success crowned their efforts, or send assistance in case of accident.

It was on the 7th of August, 1786, that the Doctor and Balmat set off separately, so as not to attract attention, but with an understanding that they were to meet at the foot of the mountain. Each carried his own provisions, reduced to the least possible weight and size. The first day passed without anything exciting, and they selected a spot under a great block of rock as a resting-place for the night. At daybreak they made another start and gained the glaciers, but lost considerable time in their attempts to turn huge crevasses that barred their path. At last they arrived at the foot of the Grands Mulets, and, after a short rest, continued their course towards the Dome du Gout, which they reached by zig-zagging up the frozen snow. They crossed the



Little Plateau, and mounted over the *débris* of ice avalanches without accident, and found themselves on the Grand Plateau by about mid-day. Thence they scaled the ice slope known as the Mur de la Côte, and after two hours of tremendously hard work

were pressed by the foot of man. When we remember how little was known in those days of the physical laws that govern high Alpine altitudes, and how ill provided the travellers were for such a perilous expedition, Paccard's and Balmat's feat is the



arrived at the Rochers Rouge. Up to this point they had not suffered much fatigue, nor had the rarity of the air caused them any inconvenience. But at this elevated spot they found that a terribly bitter wind was blowing with great violence from the north-east. To remain motionless was to be frozen to death on the spot, and so the two intrepid men determined to go on. But as they advanced their breathing became laborious, and this, added to fatigue and the deathly cold, rendered their position extremely perilous. But it was triumph or death, for having come so far they would not return without accomplishing their object. Few men would have persevered in the face of such difficulties, but Paccard and Balmat knew no such word as fail. The summit, on which human foot had never yet trod, was above them, and they would stand on its virgin snows or die. So upward and onward they went, the cruel, icy wind freezing their very marrow; but such courage, such perseverance, such devotion, were bound to meet with their reward, and at six o'clock on the evening of August 8, 1786, the Colossus of the Alps was beneath the feet of the intrepid travellers, and for the first time in the history of the world the highest snows of the White Mountain

THE GRANDS MULETS AND PETIT PLATEAU, MONT BLANC.

more remarkable; and the imperishable fame it earned for them was well deserved.

Although they were entranced with the marvellous panorama that was unrolled before their eyes, and elated to an extraordinary degree by their triumph, the two brave men were compelled to beat a hasty retreat, owing to the intensity of the cold, which was rendered unbearable by the high wind. And so they retraced their steps, and being overtaken with darkness, they were forced to pass another night on the mountain. The next morning Paccard's eyes were so inflamed with the reflection of the snow that he was blind, and had to be led by his faithful companion, but they succeeded in reaching the village in safety, and had the satisfaction of being informed by their friends, who had undertaken to keep a look-out, that, by the aid of a powerful telescope, they had been observed standing on the summit.



The news of the first ascent of the mountain that had hitherto been deemed absolutely inaccessible soon spread, and reached the ears of the celebrated *savant*, De Saussure, then a comparatively young man, and residing in Geneva, his birthplace. Fired with the desire to accomplish the ascent himself, and make scientific observations from the summit, De Saussure started for Chamonix in July, 1787. For nearly four weeks, however, the weather was atrocious, and the journey could not be attempted. But at last, on August 1, the great scientist started with a formidable caravan, consisting of a body servant and eighteen guides. Besides numerous meteorological instruments, a large tent was carried, and a great quantity of provisions. The first night was passed at the foot of the mountain, and the second night high up in the snows, where some of the guides began to funk, and expressed a fear that they would all perish, owing to the intense cold, which they said no human being could stand, notwithstanding Balmat and Paccard had endured it the preceding year. De Saussure thereupon told them to make a large excavation in the snow, and over this the tent was placed. Every opening was carefully stopped up, with the result that the cold was not felt. But the *savant* himself found the air under the tent insupportable, owing to the heat of the men's bodies and their breath, and in the dead of night he went outside to breathe the untainted air of heaven. He says the moon was shining with extraordinary brilliancy, from a sky of ebony blackness. The scene was solemn and impressive, and, though the cold was intense, it was not unbearable. Early the following morning the journey was resumed, and after many hours of laborious climbing the summit was gained.

It was a proud moment for the enthusiastic scientist. His wife, two sisters, and a son were in Chamonix, and he had promised them that he would signal his success by hoisting a flag, and having done this, he turned his attention to the study of the panorama. He says:—

"A light vapour was suspended in the lower regions, and obstructed the view over the plains of France and Lombardy; but I did not much regret this when I saw that all the great summits of the peaks I had so long desired to know were perfectly clear. I could scarcely believe my own eyes. I seemed to be in a dream as I gazed on the majestic and redoubtable peaks of the

Midi, the Argentière, and the Géant, which seemed to be at my very feet."

While De Saussure was surveying the wondrous scene, his attendants were busy putting up the tent, and arranging the instruments, and as soon as they were ready, he got to work to record his impressions and to make observations. But, according to his own account, his breathing was so difficult that he was compelled to repeatedly pause in his labours. Respiration was short and quick, and the circulation of the blood was so accelerated that he seemed to be in a fever. All his attendants suffered more or less in the same way.

Three hours and a half were spent on the summit, and preparations were then made for the descent, which was accomplished without any great difficulty, and it may be said that science was enriched by the expedition.

For twenty-seven years, De Saussure says, it had been the dream of his life to reach the summit of Mont Blanc, and he had accomplished it at last.

Strangely enough, although tourists now began to visit the valley of Chamonix, fifteen years passed without an ascent of the great mountain being made. Men could not altogether get over the fear that the "Monarch" inspired them with, and though Balmat, Paccard, De Saussure and his nineteen followers had shown the way up, no one else was found bold enough to essay the climb during those fifteen years, until an Englishman by the name of Woolley or Woldley undertook it, and reached the summit.

In 1795 Humboldt was in Chamonix, but strangely enough showed no disposition to follow in the footsteps of the eminent Genevois. After Woldley's there does not appear to have been any other ascent until 1802, when two Swiss accomplished it in company with a guide named Victor Tairraz. Seven years later this guide yielded to the entreaties of a young woman, named Marie Paradis, a native of the valley. She was twenty-two years of age, and for a long time had tried to induce some of the guides to accompany her up Mont Blanc. But they had resolutely refused, saying that she must be mad to dream of such a thing.

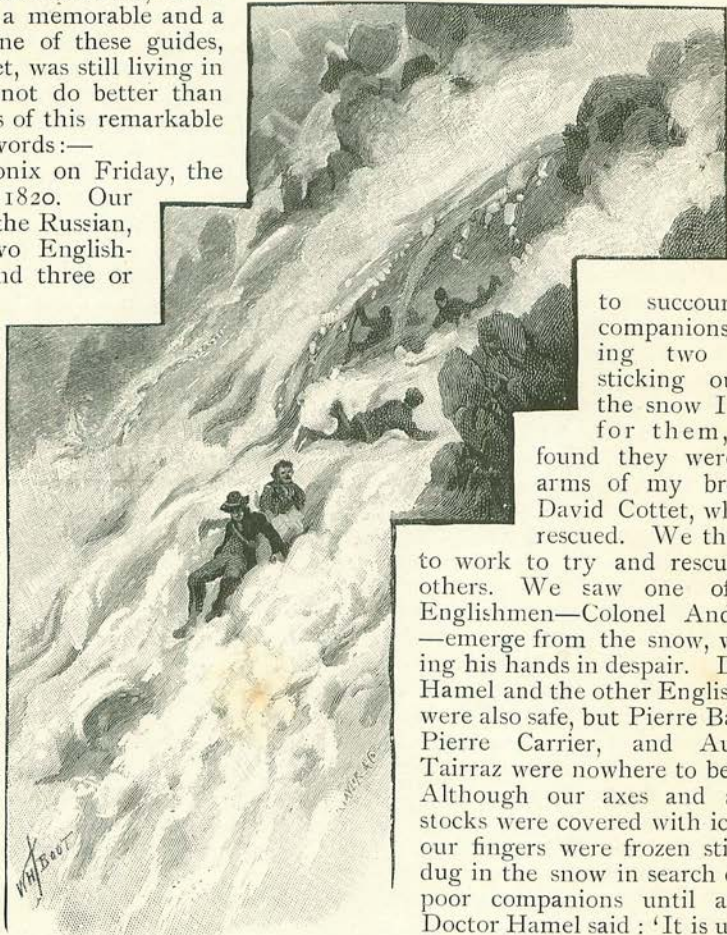
But Marie was not to be daunted, and accompanied by Victor Tairraz, the brave and hardy little woman won the proud distinction of being the first of her sex to scale the snow-clad giant. There was another



interval of time, and in August, 1820, Chamonix was visited by a Doctor Hamel, in the service of the Emperor of Russia. He had gone to the valley on a scientific mission, and one part of his programme was the ascension of Mont Blanc, for which he at once began to make preparations. At Geneva he had met two English gentlemen, who expressed a wish to accompany him, to which he gladly assented. Ten guides were engaged for the expedition, which was destined to be a memorable and a disastrous one. One of these guides, Joseph Marie Cottet, was still living in 1865, and we cannot do better than give the particulars of this remarkable ascent in his own words:—

"We left Chamonix on Friday, the 18th of August, 1820. Our party consisted of the Russian, Doctor Hamel, two Englishmen, six guides, and three or four porters. We made our first halt at the rocks of the Grands-Mulets. The weather was very threatening, and we were compelled to remain at our resting place for twenty-four hours. When Sunday came the weather was no better, but Doctor Hamel said that he did not intend to miss his opportunity, and he insisted on the journey being continued. Some of the men, however, decided to return to Chamonix, and the caravan was reduced to ten persons—the three travellers and seven guides. We started on our upward course at four o'clock in the morning. We traversed the Grand Plateau with great difficulty owing to the freshly fallen snow. We were compelled to go in single file, and were constantly menaced with avalanches, while *détours* were necessary in order to avoid the crevasses of the great glaciers. The caravan was led by

Pierre Balmat, Auguste Tairraz, and Pierre Carrier, who had to cut steps in the ice with their axes. Suddenly there arose a cry of 'We are lost!' as a tremendous roar was heard over our heads, and we were swept down with the rapidity of lightning into an abyss six hundred feet below. An avalanche had fallen. I recovered my senses and regained my feet, and not being much hurt I immediately did what I could



"AN AVALANCHE HAD FALLEN."

to succour my companions. Seeing two arms sticking out of the snow I went for them, and found they were the arms of my brother, David Cottet, whom I rescued. We then set to work to try and rescue the others. We saw one of the Englishmen—Colonel Anderson—emerge from the snow, wringing his hands in despair. Doctor Hamel and the other Englishman were also safe, but Pierre Balmat, Pierre Carrier, and Auguste Tairraz were nowhere to be seen. Although our axes and alpenstocks were covered with ice, and our fingers were frozen stiff, we dug in the snow in search of our poor companions until at last Doctor Hamel said: 'It is useless, they will live no more in this world. We can do nothing for them.'

The instinct of self-preservation prompted us to lose no time in descending; and with unutterable sorrow we left our companions in their nameless graves. Two of the victims left wives and families. Great indignation was expressed against Doctor Hamel for having insisted on continuing the ascent in such bad weather, and he lost no time in quitting the valley. The two Englishmen gave a considerable sum of



money for the families of the victims." In one of his ballads Schiller says, "The crevasse returns not its prey;" but science was to prove the falsity of this; for the celebrated geologist, Doctor Forbes, predicted in 1858 that in about forty years from the time of the accident, the great glacier where the catastrophe had taken place would give up its dead, and this prediction was strikingly verified.

On August 15, 1861, it was the National fête, and the people were leaving the church where a solemn Mass had been held, when a Chamonix guide, breathless and dust-stained, arrived at the house of the Mayor, bearing on his shoulders a sack containing a number of human remains. He had found them at the tongue of the Glacier de Bossous, which streams down into the valley from Mont Blanc. An inquiry was at once opened, and a medical examination left not a shadow of doubt that the remains were those of the guides who had perished in a crevasse of the glacier in 1820. The flesh had been so perfectly preserved by the ice that it was lifelike, and a leg of mutton which one of the three guides had carried, was, when first taken out of the ice, absolutely sweet and fresh, but on exposure to the air soon went bad. Some of the survivors of the catastrophe identified their comrades without any difficulty. In addition to these human relics, their hats and clothes were recovered, also part of a tin lantern, and a wing of a pigeon. Doctor Hamel had taken a cage of pigeons with him, with a view to liberating them at various altitudes. When Doctor Hamel heard that the remains had been recovered, he cynically suggested they should be placed in a museum at Chamonix, and they would attract thousands of travellers to the place. It is needless to say this proposal was not carried out, at any rate not altogether, for all the remains were buried, with the exception of a foot which was placed in the museum at Annecy, where it may still be seen under a glass case.

In October, 1834, the mountain was ascended by Count Henri De Tilly, who had formerly been an officer of dragoons. He had ascended Etna, and was ambitious of doing Mont Blanc. He succeeded, but narrowly escaped coming to grief: as it was, he and his guides suffered very much, and he had his feet frost-bitten. Eighteen years after the catastrophe of 1820, a Swiss lady, Mademoiselle D'Angeville, expressed

a desire to emulate Marie Paradis' feat, and reach the summit of Mont Blanc. Unlike the hardy Marie, who had been born and reared amongst the mountains, Mademoiselle D'Angeville was a delicate, fragile young woman, but of a romantic and excitable temperament. Having resolved to attempt the ascent she repaired to Chamonix, and changing her feminine costume for that of a man she started with four guides, and after tremendous fatigue, which she bore well, she reached the summit, and there she insisted on her guides hoisting her on their shoulders in order that she might say she had been higher than Mont Blanc. This lady died in 1872, at the age of 62.

At intervals between the date of Mademoiselle d'Angeville's ascent and 1851 there were various ascents, though none very noteworthy. But in the latter year Albert Smith gained the summit, and afterwards popularised—if he did not vulgarise—Mont Blanc by his lectures. Three years later a third woman—an English lady named Hamilton—climbed the mountain; and two years after that event a Miss Forman ascended in company with her father; and in 1857 Professor Tyndall added his illustrious name to the roll of successful climbers.

The next accident that took place was that of 1864, when a young porter named Ambroise Couttet lost his life through his own stupidity. Refusing to be roped, he broke through a crust of snow that covered a profound crevasse, and was never seen again. A companion, in the hope of recovering the body at least, insisted on being lowered into the crevasse by means of a rope attached to his waist. He went down for eighty feet, but as there were no signs of the bottom, and as he was losing his breath, owing to the rarity of the air in the profound abyss of ice, he signalled to be drawn up, and on reaching the surface he was greatly exhausted. A bottle attached to a cord was next lowered for over two hundred feet, but without touching the bottom. When it was drawn up again it was thickly encased in ice, thereby proving that no human being could long survive in that icy tomb.

In 1866 the Great Mountain again exacted his tribute of victims, but this accident was also due to foolhardiness. In that year Sir George Young and his two brothers, James and Albert, insisted on making the ascent without guides. They





"LOWERED INTO THE CREVASSE."

succeeded in reaching what is now known as "The Corridor," when they slipped and shot down an ice slope for about 1,800 feet. Two of them were but little injured by this fearful fall, but the third was killed. The accident was witnessed from Chamonix by means of the telescopes, which are always directed towards the mountain when an ascent is being made, and a rescue party was at once organised, and set off. They succeeded in recovering the body, but not without running grave risks, and at one time another catastrophe seemed imminent.

A terribly sad event was that of the 12th of October, 1866. A Captain Arkwright, accom-

panied by his mother and two sisters, visited Chamonix at the beginning of October of that year. The weather was exceptionally fine, and the captain expressed a desire to ascend the mountain. The preparations were made, and very early in the morning of the 12th he started with his sister, who was to remain at the Grands Mulets sketching. The chief guide was Sylvain Couttet; the second, a man named Simond; and, in addition, there were two porters. The party reached the cabane of the Mulets without adventure. After a short rest the men went on, leaving Miss Arkwright at the cabane. The caravan suc-

ceeded in gaining the steep slope which leads to the Grand Plateau, when an enormous overhanging mass of ice became detached, and, starting an avalanche, Captain Arkwright, Simond, and the two porters were swept into a profound crevasse. Sylvain Couttet escaped by making a prodigious leap, which took him clear of the track of the avalanche. When he had recovered from the shock, he searched for his companions, and, to his horror, he saw the body of Simond absolutely crushed to pieces by the ice. The others were nowhere to be seen. He at once descended to the cabane, where Miss Arkwright was sitting on the rocks sketching the dome. Unable to conceal his horror and grief, she guessed the truth, for she had heard the avalanche fall. The scene that ensued in that awful solitude can be better imagined than described. The bodies of the captain and the two porters were never recovered. The great glacier kept its prey, but will give them up some day.

Of all the dark, sad years that are woven into the human story connected with Mont Blanc, that of 1870 is the darkest and saddest. It was a year of bitterness for France, and her tourist and health resorts were deserted, or nearly so. A few people found their way to Chamonix, and amongst them were an American gentleman named Mark, his wife, and sister-in-law, Miss Wilkinson. They started to ascend the Great White Mountain on August 2, accompanied by only two guides. By the time the Grands Mulets was reached the two ladies were suffering from great fatigue, and the keeper of the cabane offered the services of his porter—a young man named Olivier Gay—as Mr. Mark had determined to proceed. Gay was accepted, and all went well until "The Corridor" was reached, when the ladies were so exhausted that they could go no further. Gay thereupon undertook to conduct them back to the cabane, and Mark and his two guides continued upwards. In a short time, however, the echoes of the icy world were awakened by the piercing scream of a woman. The men turned, and saw Miss Wilkinson wringing her hands in frenzy; Gay and Mrs. Mark were nowhere to be seen. They had both fallen into a crevasse, and their bodies were never recovered. Mrs. Mark was the first woman the mountain had claimed as his victim. This sad event, however, was but the prelude to a more ghastly tragedy a month later. Two



American gentlemen—Mr. John Randall and Mr. Joseph Bean, of Baltimore—in company with a Mr. McCorkindale, a Scotch minister from Gourrock, ascended the mountain with three guides and five porters. The weather was exceptionally fine, and the summit was reached without adventure. But suddenly a cloud descended. It was the falling of the curtain on the lives of all those eleven men. The cloud became a dense fog, and a *tourmente* arose. Night came, out the ill-starred caravan had not returned to the cabane. During eight days the storm continued, and the fog shut out everything. All attempts at succour were absolutely impossible. Men could not live on the cruel mountain in that *tourmente*, nor could they find their way in the dense mist. At last, when the weather changed, a search party went out. Lying in the snow, near the summit, and as if they were all asleep, were ten bodies, including the three travellers, three guides, and four porters. They had all been frozen to death. The body of the eleventh man

words. . . . I die with faith in God, and my last thoughts are of you (his wife). Adieu to all. I hope we shall meet in heaven."

The leading guide was an intrepid fellow, named Jean Balmat, a descendant of the renowned family of guides. It was his fortieth ascent but all his experience and all his courage could avail nothing against the mighty forces of Nature. The mountain was in a sullen mood, and he exacted the penalty of all those lives.

It is pleasant to turn from this tragedy to a more romantic page in the story. A young lady, Miss Isabella Straton, who had already made three summer ascents, was ambitious of gaining the summit in winter. Possessed of indomitable courage and extraordinary powers of endurance, she was undeterred by the current stories of insupportable cold, and she started from Chamoni on the morning of January 28, 1876, accompanied by two guides—one of them being Jean Charlet, who had already greatly distinguished himself as a mountaineer—and two

porters. They left Grands Mulets the following morning, and had proceeded some distance when one of the porters fell into a crevasse. After considerable difficulty he was rescued, very considerably bruised and battered. The party were consequently necessitated to return to the cabane and spend another night there. A fresh start was made on the following day, the wounded porter being left behind.

The summit was successfully gained; the day being magnificent in its clearness, but the cold was fearful, 29 degrees of Reaumur being marked. Both Miss Straton and Guide Charlet were frostbitten, and only a few minutes could be spent on the dome. This intrepid lady accomplished a double feat that day, for she won a husband also. She fell in love with her guide, Jean Charlet, and married him. Being wealthy and well connected, she raised her husband from the



"FROZEN TO DEATH."

was never found. It is supposed he had made an endeavour to get back to the cabane to obtain succour, and had perished in a crevasse. In the pocket of Mr. Bean was a diary, in which he had continued to make notes until the cold had frozen his hands and feet and he could write no more. The last entry is terrible in its pathos:—

"We have nothing to eat; my feet are already frozen, and I am dying. I have only the strength to write a few more



level of a peasant to a position of affluence. They have built themselves a beautiful house in the valley of Chamonix, where they permanently reside with their family.

A few years later a man with a wooden leg attempted to reach the summit, and nearly succeeded, but became prostrated with exhaustion, and had to be carried down. Then a blind man went up; not for the sake of what he could see, but for the sake of what he could say. *De gustibus non est disputandum!* And the most recent thing in the way of eccentricities is the ascent by a scientist, who, being lame, was taken up by a number of guides on a sort of sledge. A proposition has been seriously made of late years to establish an observatory on the summit of the Monarch.

its physical features are the same now as they were thousands of years ago. Stupendous solitudes of snow and ice, and fearful slopes down which the avalanches thunder, tremendous crevasses, towering seracs, mighty precipices—these remain, and probably will remain, for all time. They represent Nature in her sublimest aspect; and though the mountain were ascended by forty people every day, it could never be vulgarised. The grandeur, the weirdness, the majesty, the might are there, and nothing can detract from them. Owing to the intimate knowledge that has been gained of the mountain, and the means that have been provided



THE MER-DE-GLACE, MONT BLANC.

But it is doubtful whether the proposition will ever take practical shape. The initial engineering difficulties would probably be overcome; but the enormous accumulations of snow would entirely bury any construction of the kind, even if the *tourmentes* which rage round that lofty peak did not carry it bodily away.

At the present day the ascent of Mont Blanc has become very popular, and on an average there are about forty ascents a year. It has been said in consequence that the mountain is vulgarised, but that can never be. It is on too vast and grand a scale, and

for shelter, the difficulties of the ascent are now reduced to a minimum. On the Grands Mulets—to which reference has frequently been made in this paper—a rough hut has long existed, and has recently been improved. The Grands Mulets is a mass of rock that rises up from a stern wilderness of ice and snow. On a ledge of this rock the cabane has been erected. It is in charge of a man in the summer months, and is provided with primitive sleeping accommodation, while limited quantities of provisions are obtainable. The ascent to the Grands Mulets is



over much broken up and crevassed glaciers lying at a steeple angle. The rocks of the Grands Mulets are 10,000 feet above the level of the sea. About seven hours are required to gain the summit from the cabane. Last year the well-known French *savant*, Monsieur Vallot, caused to be erected at his own expense a substantial hut under what is known as the Bosses, not far from the summit, his object being to afford the means for scientific observation. But it will also prove a boon to mountaineers, and render such a tragedy as that of 1870 almost impossible. The hut consists of two apartments, one being reserved for scientific instruments; the other is for the use of travellers. The rooms are warmed by means of oil stoves, and a good supply of blankets is provided. The hut is built of wood, surrounded with loose stone walls, and several lightning conductors are affixed to the roof. From this shelter the summit can be gained in about an hour and a quarter.

It will not be inappropriate to close this paper with a few particulars of the death of Jacques Balmat. His triumph over Mont Blanc brought him fame, though not riches. Of a restless and ambitious disposition, he wanted to know more of the world than he could learn about it in his own mountain-enclosed valley. So he set out to travel, and amongst other places visited London. When he returned once more to his beloved mountains he conceived the idea that gold was to be found amongst them, and in his hunt for the precious metal he undertook many perilous and hazardous expeditions, but his dreams were not realised, and though he was pursuing a phantom his thirst for riches grew.

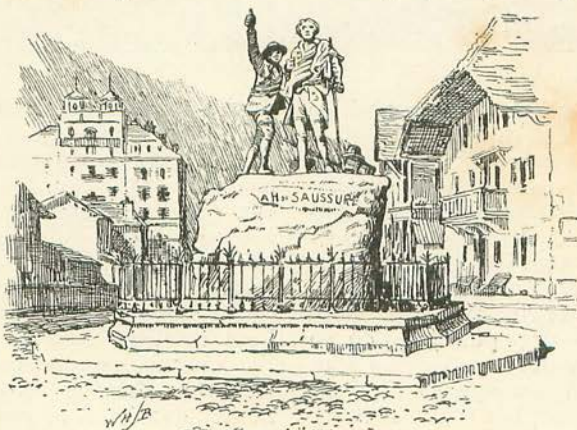
In 1834, although an old man, his passion for climbing had not diminished; and having heard that gold had once been found in the valley of Sixt, to the north-west of Chamonix, he set off to explore that wild region, and narrowly escaped coming to grief. He returned to his home discon-

solate. But soon after something induced him to once more visit Sixt, where he associated himself with a noted chamois hunter, and the two pursued their investigations amongst the high peaks that shut in the valley. One day Balmat, in spite of the entreaties of his comrade, insisted on crossing an overhanging ledge of snow. He had not gone many yards, however, when the snow cornice gave way, and Balmat disappeared, falling a depth of more than 400 feet on to jagged and splintered rocks, in a tremendous abyss, and on a spot that was incessantly bombarded with ice avalanches. His death must have been instantaneous. For a long time the chamois hunter concealed the truth, fearing that the accident might lead to others discovering the supposed gold mine. But after a while Balmat's sons and other members of his family, becoming uneasy at his absence, set off to look for him, and subsequently the hunter related the story of the accident. Attempts were made to recover the body, but had to be given up.

For nineteen years no other attempt was made, but in 1853 a strong desire was expressed by the people of Chamonix that the remains of the celebrated mountaineer should, if possible, be recovered and accorded Christian burial.

In pursuance of this object a very strong body of the best guides set off for Sixt, and at last, but only with extreme difficulty, they reached the spot from whence Balmat had fallen. It was then seen that no mortal power could recover the body, owing to the avalanches of rock and ice that incessantly fell into the horrible abyss that had become Jacques Balmat's grave. A fitting one, surely, for so true a mountaineer! He sleeps quietly enough in those profound

depths, and the thunder of the avalanche is his requiem; while the magnificent, great, white mountain, now known as Mont Blanc, is his eternal monument, which shall endure until the great globe itself dissolves and passes away! Surely no man ever had a grander one!



MONUMENT TO JAKUES BALMAT AND DE SAUSSURE AT CHAMONIX.