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NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY TO THE SUMMIT OF MONT BLANC.



Passing a crevice in the Glacier of Boissons

[Passing a crevice in the Glacier of Boissons](#)

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY TO THE Summit of Mont Blanc,

MADE IN JULY, 1819.

BY WM. HOWARD, M. D.

"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."

The account of the following journey was written a few days after its execution, while the author was confined to his chamber by the inconveniences he had suffered, and it was then penned for the gratification of his immediate friends, and without any view to publication. The partiality of friends, however, having permitted it, during his absence, to appear in the *Analectic Magazine*, for May 1820, it excited more attention than he could have anticipated, which has induced the author to correct the errors arising from haste and other sources, and to republish it in the present form.

Baltimore, April, 1821.

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY TO THE SUMMIT OF MONT BLANC.

----- "Above me are the Alps
The palaces of Nature, whose vast walls
Have pinnacled in clouds their snowy scalps,
And thron'd Eternity in icy halls
Of cold sublimity, where forms and falls
The avalanche—the thunderbolt of snow,
All that expands the spirit, yet appals,
Gather around these summits, as to show
How earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below."

BYRON.

NARRATIVE OF A JOURNEY, &c.

Geneva, July, 1819.

You, my dear friend, who are well acquainted from my infancy with my clambering disposition, which, within these few months, has carried me to the top of both Vesuvius and *Ætna*, will not be much surprised to learn, that I have attempted, with success, to mount to the summit of Mont Blanc; an aerial journey which the sight of this mountain has inspired many persons with a wish to accomplish; but in which few have engaged, and still fewer have succeeded. I am somewhat afraid that you will condemn the expedition as a wild one, and will justly consider the gratification of our curiosity, which was, unfortunately, the only object we attained, as an inadequate recompense for our toil and danger; but you have no cause to fear my embarking in similar adventures in future. Having reached a spot, undoubtedly the highest in Europe, and, with the exception of the Himalaya mountains in India, the highest in the Old World, my curiosity is completely gratified, and there is scarcely any possibility of my meeting with an enterprise of this nature, of sufficient magnitude to renew its excitement: since five of the loftiest of the Alleghanies piled on each other, would scarcely reach to the height I have attained. To give you a correct idea of the nature of our undertaking, I will begin with a concise account of this king of the Alps, and of the various attempts that have been made to reach its summit.

Mont Blanc is situated amidst some of the highest mountains of Savoy, forming a part of the great chain of the Alps, above which, however, it raises far its snowy head, as with a dignified air of conscious triumph. It is this white head, which its elevation renders doubly bright, that gives its name. On the north side of the mountain, and immediately at its foot, is the valley of Chamouny, which is sixteen leagues south from Geneva, and is much frequented in the summer season by the inhabitants of that city, and strangers, who throng to this enchanted vale, to enjoy the coolness of the air, and to view its stupendous glaciers, several of which are formed by the snow and ice gliding down from Mont Blanc itself. On the south-east side is the valley of Entrèves, which separates Mont Blanc both from the great and the little St. Bernard, and through which runs a small river, whose waters join the Po, below Turin, while the Arva, which flows through Chamouny, joins the Rhone, near Geneva. These rivers finally discharge themselves into the sea, at the distance of several hundred miles from each other; the one into the

Mediterranean, near Marseilles, and the other into the Adriatic, near Venice. The chain of Alps, of which Mont Blanc forms a part, runs from N. E. to S. W. and is partly surmounted in its neighbourhood, by sharp pointed rocks, whose sides are too steep for the snow to rest upon, and of which seven, rising abruptly to a great height, have the appropriate name of the "Needles of Chamouny."

The height of Mont Blanc, according to the observations of Saussure, is 14,790 French feet above the level of the sea,^[A] which is only 5800 less than that of Chimborazo, the summit of which has been never reached: on the other hand, its relative height above the surrounding country is greater; for Mont Blanc is 11,500 above the valley of Chamouny, while Chimborazo, according to Humboldt, is only 11,200 above the plain of Tapia, at its foot. It is calculated that, from this height, the eye could reach sixty-eight leagues, or about 170 of our miles, without being intercepted by the convexity of the earth. Mont Blanc is seen from Lyons in all its magnificence; from the mountains of Burgundy, from Dijon, and even from Langrès, sixty-five leagues distant in a straight line: M. Saussure thought he recognised the mountain of Cavme, near Toulon.

[A] About 15,500 English feet, or something less than three miles.

In 1760 and 61, Saussure, the celebrated philosopher of Geneva, then engaged in examining the natural history of the Alps, promised a considerable reward to any person who should succeed in finding a practicable path to the summit, offering even to pay for the lost time of those who made ineffectual efforts. The first who undertook this, was Pierre Simon, a hunter of Chamouny, in 1762: but he was unsuccessful. In 1775, four men of the same village endeavoured for the same object, and with as ill success, to follow the ridge of the Montagne de la Côte, which runs parallel to the Glacier of Boissons. In 1783, three others followed the same track, but were attacked by an increasing disposition to sleep, from which they could only relieve themselves by returning. M. Bouritt, of Geneva, made two ineffectual attempts the same year, and the following year another, accompanied by Saussure, his own son, and fifteen guides.

In June 1786, six men of the valley of Chamouny, renewed the effort to reach the summit, but fatigue and cold forced them to renounce it; one of them, however, Jacques Balmat, separating from his companions to search for crystals, and having lost himself, was prevented by a storm from rejoining them, and compelled to pass the night on the snow, unprovided and alone; youth, however, and the vigour of his constitution, saved his life. In the morning he perceived the top at no great distance, and having the whole day before him to provide for his descent, he examined leisurely the approaches to it, and observed one, that appeared more accessible than any he had hitherto seen. At his return to Chamouny, he was taken ill, in consequence of his great exposure, and was attended by Dr. Paccard, the physician of the village, to whom he communicated his discovery, and offered, in gratitude for his care, to guide him to the summit of Mont Blanc.

In consequence of this, Jacques Balmat and Dr. Paccard, set out from Chamouny the 7th of August, the same year, and slept on the top of the Montagne de la Côte. The next day they experienced great difficulties and excessive fatigue, and were long doubtful of the ultimate event of their enterprise; but finally, at half past 6, P. M. they reached the pinnacle of the mountain, in sight of many visitors, who were at Chamouny, watching their progress with telescopes. The cold was so intense, that provision was frozen in their pockets, the ink congealed in their ink horns, and the mercury in Fahrenheit's thermometer, sunk to eighteen and a half degrees. They remained about half an hour on the top, regained at midnight the Montagne de la Côte, and after two hours repose, set out for Chamouny, where they arrived at eight in the morning, with their lips swollen, their faces excoriated, and their eyes much inflamed; and it was some time before they recovered from these disagreeable effects.

As soon as the intelligence of this success reached Saussure at Geneva, he determined on making a similar attempt: which he in fact did the same year, but was compelled by unfavourable weather to return. He was, however, not discouraged, but as the season was now far advanced, he postponed his operations until the ensuing summer. Accordingly, on the 1st of August, 1787, he again set out from Chamouny, accompanied by his servant, and eighteen guides, carrying a tent, a bed, ladders, cords, provisions, and philosophical instruments.

The party arrived early the same day at the Montagne de la Côte, where they passed the night. The next day, notwithstanding an increase of dangers and difficulties, they passed under the Dome de Gouté, and reached a platform, or small plain, at the height of 11,790 feet above the sea, where they pitched their tent in the snow, and passed the night. The following morning, (August 3d) the snow was so hard, and the ascent so steep, that they were compelled to cut their footsteps with a hatchet, and it was only by proceeding with the greatest caution, that they were enabled to pass this dangerous acclivity with safety. They, however, persevered, and reached the summit about an hour before noon, in view of many persons who were observing them from Chamouny. M. Saussure turned his eyes to the house where his mother and sisters were watching his progress with a telescope, and had the satisfaction of seeing the waving of a flag, which was the signal they had agreed to make, as soon as they should be assured of his safety. The latter part of his ascent was the slowest and most fatiguing, owing to the difficulty of breathing, occasioned by the rarity of the air: the stoutest of his guides could not take more than thirty steps, without stopping to take breath. No one had the least appetite, but all were much tormented by thirst. The guides pitched the tent, in which M. Saussure remained four hours, making a number of observations. At half after three, the party began to descend, and slept lower 1100 feet than the preceding night. The next day they arrived, without any accident, at Chamouny.

This successful expedition of Saussure, and the interesting account he published of it, inspired many persons with a wish of accomplishing the same task; but they were generally soon deterred by an examination into the difficulties attending its execution, and returned satisfied with a view from the vallies below, of the terrific glaciers, and everlasting snows, which defend the approaches to the summit. The following are the principal attempts that have since been made, and it will be perceived that of these few, only a part have succeeded.

On the 8th of August, 1787, five days after M. Saussure's return, Col. Beaufoy, an Englishman, set out from Chamouny for Mont Blanc, accompanied by ten guides. He reached the top the following day, and returned the third day to the village, with his face and eyes so inflamed, that he nearly lost his sight in consequence. As he was not properly provided with instruments, he was unable to add much to the observations which had been made by Saussure. He, however, determined the latitude of the summit to be $45^{\circ}, 49', 59''$.

The year following these two journeys, (1788,) Mr. Bouritt, of Geneva, in company with his son, two other gentleman, and a number of guides, attempted the ascent of Mont Blanc. The party was dispersed by a storm, and only Mr. Bouritt, his son, and three guides, succeeded in reaching the top, where the violence of the cold compelled them to abridge their stay to a few minutes. While there, Mr. Bouritt thought he perceived the sea in the direction of Genoa; but the immense distance rendered the objects at the horizon, too indistinct to be certain of it. The whole party returned to Chamouny in a terrible condition. One of Mr. Bouritt's companions, who had lost himself, suffered dreadfully, as well as the guides who were with him, and returned with his feet and hands frozen, while some of the company, who were more fortunate, had only their fingers and ears in the same condition. Mr. Bouritt was obliged to wash for thirteen days in ice water, to restore the use of his limbs, which had suffered from the extreme cold.

In 1792, four Englishmen undertook the same journey, but were prevented, by an accident, from proceeding farther than the Montagne de la Côte, where, unfortunately, one of the guides had his leg broken, and another his skull driven in: they themselves were all more or less wounded. A false step of one of the foremost of the party upon a loose rock, which brought it and a number of others down upon his companions, was the cause of this accident.

M. Forneret, of Lausanne, and M. d'Ortern set out on the 10th of August, 1802, with seven guides, for Mont Blanc, and notwithstanding a storm, reached the summit the following day. They remained there only twenty minutes, and returned on the 12th to Chamouny, protesting that nothing in the world could tempt them to undertake again the same expedition.

In August, 1808, Jacques Balmat, surnamed Mont Blanc, from his having been the first to discover the way to the summit, safely conducted thither fifteen of the inhabitants of Chamouny, one of whom was a *woman*.

About this time also he returned with two of his companions, and placed on the top an obelisk of wood, twelve feet in height, (which they had brought up in pieces) to serve in the trigonometrical survey, that was then making of the country.

In 1812, M. Rodasse, a banker of Hamburgh, undertook and accomplished the same journey, without any accident.

The 16th of September, 1816, the Comte de Lucy, a Frenchman, succeeded, notwithstanding the severity of the cold he experienced, in attaining a rock only 600 feet lower than the summit of Mont Blanc. He was there, however, so entirely overcome with cold and fatigue, that he was unable to proceed this short distance, and compelled, with much reluctance, to return. On reaching the valley he was unable to walk, but was carried by his guides to the inn, where his feet proved to be so much frozen, that on drawing his boot, the skin peeled off and remained in it. Two of his guides were also severely frozen.

Count Malzeski, a Pole, left Chamouny the 5th of August, 1818, for Mont Blanc, accompanied by eleven guides, reached the summit the following day, and returned, in safety, the third, without suffering much more inconvenience than having his nose frozen.

During our visit to Chamouny, in the beginning of this month, my friend Dr. Van Rensselaer and myself, in our various excursions to the glaciers, and other scenes of the valley, had frequently opportunities of conversing with the guides, who had participated in these journeys, and among them with old Balmat, the Columbus of Mont Blanc. The result was, that our curiosity was strongly excited, and being induced by their representations of the almost certainty of succeeding in the present favourable weather, we finally determined, after much deliberation, to make the attempt. We therefore engaged *Marie Coutet*, an experienced guide, who had been three times on the summit, as leader, and eight other guides to accompany us. They refused to undertake the journey with a smaller party, on account of the number of articles which it was necessary to take with us, as a ladder, cords, provisions, charcoal to melt the snow for drinking, and a number of other things, which were indispensable, and which formed a sufficient quantity to load each of the nine with a considerable burthen. One day was occupied in making preparations, on which our comfort and our ultimate success depended. These were passed in review in the evening, and having found that nothing material was omitted, an early hour the next day was appointed for our departure.

Accordingly, on Sunday the 11th of July, we left the village of Chamouny, at five o'clock, full of anxiety ourselves, and accompanied by the good wishes of the honest inhabitants for our success. The necessity of taking advantage of the fine weather, opposed our delaying another day. Our

guides, who in common with all the inhabitants of the mountainous parts of Savoy, are very attentive to the duties of their religion, were unwilling to set out on a church day, without having previously attended service. They had, therefore, induced the Curé to celebrate mass at three o'clock, and, notwithstanding the fatigue they expected during the day, the early hour had not prevented them from attending it.

We descended the valley by the side of the Arva, about a league, till we approached the glacier of Boissons, and then turning suddenly to the left into the woods, we began immediately a very steep ascent, parallel to, and about a half mile from the edge of the glacier. After about three hours toilsome mounting, we came to the last house on our road. It was the highest dwelling in the neighbourhood, and was one of those cottages called "Chalets," which are inhabited only during three of the summer months, when the peasants drive their cattle from the plains below, to the then richer verdure of the mountains. We found there the old man and his two daughters; his wife, as is the custom, was left behind to take care of the house in the valley. After refreshing ourselves with a delicious draught of fresh milk, and receiving the wishes of these good people, for a 'bon voyage,' we bade adieu to all traces of man, and continued to mount. Another hour's toil brought us above the region of wood, after which the few stunted vegetables we met with, gradually diminished in size, and when we arrived, at 10 o'clock, at the upper edge of the glacier of Boissons, only a few mosses, and the most hardy alpine plants were to be found.

We had been compelled a little before, by the precipices of the Aiguille du Midi, which presented themselves like a wall before us, to change our direction, and instead of proceeding parallel to the glacier, to strike off suddenly towards it. We had now a close view of some of the obstacles which bar the approach to Mont Blanc; the glacier of Boissons, on which we were about to enter, seemed to me absolutely impassable. The only relief to the white snow and ice before us, was an occasional rock, thrusting its sharp point above their surface, and too steep to permit the snow to lodge on it. One of these rocks, or rather a chain of them, called the 'Grand Mulet,' which we had destined for our resting place for the night, was before us, but far above our heads at the distance of four or five miles; the glacier, however, still intervened, and appeared to defy all attempts to approach it.

The glacier of Boissons, like all the glaciers of the Alps, is an immense mass of ice filling a valley which stretches down the mountain side, and is formed by the accumulated snow and ice, which are constantly in the summer months, falling from above. While the glaciers are thus continually increasing on the surface, the internal heat of the earth is slowly melting them below. Hence, when they are large, there generally proceeds from under them a considerable stream: such are the sources of the Rhine and of the Rhone. Their surface, often resembles that of a violent agitated sea, suddenly congealed. They are frequently of several leagues in breadth, and from 100 to 600 feet in depth. The snow which falls on them, to the depth of several feet every winter, is softened by the sun's rays in summer—and freezing again at the return of cold weather, but in a more solid state, forms a successive layer every year. This stratum may be easily measured, (as each of them is distinctly separated from its neighbour by a dark line,) at the section made by those cracks, which traverse every glacier in all directions. These cracks or crevices, are generally thought to be caused by the irregular sinking of part of the mass, whose support below has been gradually melted away. They are formed suddenly, and frequently with a noise that may be heard at the distance of several miles, and with a shock that makes the neighbouring country tremble: this effect takes place principally in summer. These rents are from a few inches to 20, 30, or even 50 or 60 feet in breadth, and generally of immense depth: probably extending to the bottom of the glacier. They present the greatest danger and difficulty to the passenger. They are often concealed by a layer of snow, which gives no indication on its surface, of its want of solidity; and it often happens that the chamois hunter, notwithstanding all his caution, suddenly sinks through this treacherous veil into the chasm beneath.

We remained a couple of hours at our resting place, to take some refreshment, and to regain strength for our next difficult task. Jacques Balmat accompanied us this far, to point out the best means of attaining that spot on which he was the first to set foot; but the infirmities of age prevented him from accompanying us farther. Our feet seemed to linger, and to leave with reluctance the last ground they were to touch until the period of our return.

We however entered on the glacier with confidence in the skill and prudence of our guides; several of whom being hunters, and accustomed to chase the chamois over such places, were acquainted with all the precautions, that it was necessary to take for our safety. To avoid the danger of falling into the crevices, especially those masked by the snow, we connected ourselves, three persons together, at the distance of 10 or 12 feet apart, by a cord round the body: so that in case of one of the three falling into a chasm, the other two could at least support him, until assistance could be procured from the rest of the party.

Each person was provided with a pole, 6 feet long, and pointed at the bottom with iron, which we found to be a necessary article. Where the crevices were not more than two or three feet broad, we leaped over them with the assistance of our staff; others we passed on natural bridges of snow, that threatened every moment to sink with us into the abyss, and over others, we made a bridge of the ladder, which was extremely slight, as otherwise it would have been impossible for a man to carry it up the steeps we had ascended. Without its assistance, we could not have passed the glacier. Over this slender support we crawled with caution, suspended over a chasm, into which we could see to an immense depth; but of which in no instance could we see the bottom. We were sometimes forced to pass on a narrow ridge of treacherous ice, not more than a foot in breadth, with one of these terrific chasms on either side. The firm step, with which we saw

our guides pass these difficulties, inspired us with confidence: but I cannot even now think of some of the situations we were placed in, without a feeling of dread; and especially when in bed, and in the silence of the night, they present themselves to my imagination, I involuntarily shrink with horror at the idea, and am astonished in recollecting what little sensation I felt at the moment.

We threw down into some of the narrow cracks, pieces of ice and fragments of rock, and heard for a considerable time, the more and more distant sound, as they bounded from side to side. In no instance could we perceive the stone strike the bottom; but the sound, instead of ceasing suddenly, as would then have been the case, grew fainter and fainter, until it was too feeble to be heard. What then must be the immense depth of these openings, when in these silent regions, the noise of a large stone striking the bottom is too distant to be heard at the orifice!

The number of openings we met with, which were broader than the length of our ladder, and which, of course, we had no means of crossing, rendered our path extremely circuitous. We were often enabled, by the ladder's assistance, to scale high and perpendicular banks of snow. It sometimes proved too short to reach to the top; but where the steep was not absolutely perpendicular, we contrived in several instances to remedy this inconvenience. One of the guides, standing on the top of the ladder, enabled the rest, who clambered up by his assistance, and over his shoulders, to reach the summit; when there, we easily drew up him and the ladder with cords.

We were occasionally compelled to retrace our steps, and we were frequently so involved in the intricacies of the glacier, that we had to remain without proceeding, a considerable time, until the guides, who were dispersed in every direction on the discovery, could find a practical path to extricate us.

In addition to these difficulties, I had not been long on the glacier, before I perceived that my faithless boot had given way; which, as every thing depended upon the state of our feet, was a serious misfortune. Necessity, however, is the mother of invention, and I contrived to bind it with cords in such a manner, that it served me tolerably well the rest of the journey.

In consequence of all these obstacles, we only arrived at 5 o'clock at the "Grand Mulet," not more than four or five miles distant, in a straight line from the point where we entered on the glacier; but, from the circuitous route we had taken, we could not have walked less, in this distance, than 14 or 15 miles. We were now 11,000 feet above the level of the sea, and 8,000 feet above the village of Chamouny. A niche on the steep side, and near the top of the rock, about a hundred and fifty feet from its base, and to which we had much difficulty in climbing, was selected for our lodging place; indeed it was the only part of the rock, that afforded any thing like a level place. We were fortunate in finding the day had been so warm, that there was water in some of the crevices of the ice, which circumstance enabled us to economize our charcoal. The sun shone very bright on our side of the rock; but as soon as it sunk below the horizon, the eternal frost around us regained its influence, and the air became very cold. We had, however, time to dry our boots and pantaloons, and I found a pair of large woolen stockings, that I had with me, an invaluable article. Our guides stretched the ladder from one point of the rock to another, and, throwing over it a couple of sheets they had brought for the purpose, formed a kind of tent, just large enough for Dr. Van Rensselaer and myself to creep in: a single blanket upon the rock was our bed. The guides were so loaded with indispensable articles, that we had not been able to bring a blanket, or even an extra coat to cover us.

After a cold and uncomfortable supper, we crept into our den, soon after the genial sun had left us, and endeavoured, by every means our ingenuity could suggest, but ineffectually, to keep ourselves warm. We suffered much from the cold, but principally towards morning, as the thermometer was several degrees below freezing. The night seemed to last at least twenty hours; at one time I thought the day must certainly be not distant, and was surprised, at looking at my watch by the light of the moon, to find it only 11 o'clock. Tired of inaction, and shivering with the cold, I crawled out about midnight to endeavour to warm myself, by the exercise of clambering on the rock. The view around was sublime, and rendered me for a time insensible to all feelings of personal suffering.

The sky was very clear, but perfectly black; the moon and stars, whose rays were not obscured by passing through the lower dense region of the atmosphere, as when seen from the surface of the earth, shone with a brilliancy, tenfold of what I had ever observed from below; and the comet, with its bright tail, formed in the north-west, a beautiful object. Nothing was to be seen around the rock on which we were placed, but white snow and some heavy clouds, that, floating below us, shut out the valley from our view. The guides appeared to be all asleep, and the only interruption to the silence of death, was the occasional avalanche, rolling with the sound of distant thunder from the highest part of the surrounding glaciers, and heightening the feelings of awful sublimity, which our situation was so calculated to inspire.

As our lodging was extremely uncomfortable in every respect, we were under no temptation of lying till a late hour in the morning. On the contrary, we hailed with joy the first appearance of the dawn, which enabled us to substitute the warmth of marching, for the cold inactivity from which we had suffered all night. We set out at three o'clock, leaving most of our provisions and other articles on the rock. Four hours of laborious, but not dangerous walking, brought us to a large plain, called the 'Grand Plateau,' which is nearly surrounded, (on the one hand) by a spur of Mont Blanc, and the Aiguille du Midi; on the other, by the Montagne de la Côte, while Mont Blanc presents itself directly in front. These mountains form a steep amphitheatre around this plain. Here we stopped an hour to breakfast, and to recruit strength for the last and most difficult part

of the ascent. We were now more than 12,000 feet above the level of the sea, and only 3,000 feet lower than the summit, which was in full view before us. But I looked around, in vain, for any part of its steep sides that seemed to offer a possibility of being scaled, and when the guides pointed out the route we were to take, among and over precipices, and huge broken masses of snow, and up almost perpendicular steeps, I involuntarily shrunk at the prospect, and could not forbear casting my eye wistfully at our road back. But it would not have done to be deterred at this time by a few difficulties; and a moment's reflection, on the skill and experience of our guides, renewed our confidence, and we began cheerfully to mount the first steep before us. We here began to feel more seriously an effect, that is always experienced at considerable heights, and which had not much incommoded us before. It was impossible for the strongest of us, to take more than twenty or thirty steps, without stopping to take breath, and this effect gradually increased as we continued to ascend; insomuch, that when near the summit, even the stoutest of our guides, who could run for leagues over the lower mountains without panting, could not take more than twelve, or at most fifteen steps, without being ready to sink for want of breath. If we attempted to exceed this number by even three or four steps, a horrible oppression, as of approaching death, seized us; our limbs became excessively painful, and threatened to sink under us. It is very possible, that Walter Scot's hero,

Up Ben Lomond's side could press,
And not a sob his toil confess;

but I am very certain he could not perform the same feat on Mont Blanc. It is remarkable, that a few seconds rest was sufficient to restore both our strength and breath. One of our guides, a robust man, who had been once on the summit, was so much incommoded, that we were compelled to leave him behind to await our return. I experienced some inconvenience from a slight degree of nausea and head-ache, of which most of those, who have made this journey have complained. When ascending *Ætna*, two months before, I had been seriously affected both by a difficulty of breathing, and by a violent thumping of the heart and arteries, which was loud enough to be easily heard by my companions, and which the slightest exertion was sufficient to excite. In the present instance I dreaded these effects, and had already begun to feel them in an uncomfortable degree; but was almost entirely relieved by drinking plentifully of vinegar and water, with which our guides, to whom experience had taught its utility, had taken care to be well provided. This drink was extremely agreeable to us; wine on the contrary, disgusted us. All the water we had, we had brought from the rock at which we slept, where we had carefully collected it from the cracks of the ice: for we were now in the region of eternal ice, where rain never falls, and where the utmost power of the midsummer sun can only soften, in a slight degree, the surface of the snow.

The acclivity we were now ascending, was steeper than any we had before encountered, so much so that we could only accomplish it by a zigzag path, advancing not more than a few feet every 20 or 30 yards we walked. To have an idea of our situation, you must imagine us marching in single file on the steep mountain side, placing with the greatest care our feet in the steps, which the hardness of the snow rendered it necessary for our leader to cut with an axe, supporting ourselves with our poles against the upper side of the slope, and having on the other side, the same rapid slope terminating below in a precipice several hundred feet in height, over which we saw rapidly hurried all the small pieces of ice, that we loosened with our feet. Our situation was similar to that of a person scaling the steep and iced roof of a lofty house, and constantly liable, by an incautious step, to be suddenly precipitated over the eaves. After we had been proceeding in this manner for some time, I looked down on the Plateau beneath, for the guide we had left, and when at last I discerned him, like a speck on the snow, my head began to grow dizzy at the idea of the distance below me, and I was forced to keep my head averted from this side, to recover from this disagreeable feeling.

Our guides had attached themselves and us with cords, each three persons together, as when passing the glacier. They were provided with large iron cramps fastened to their feet, which prevented them from slipping. Doctor Van Ranselaer and myself had found this contrivance impede too much our walking, and after a short trial had given it up, so that we had to rely on the firmness of foot of those guides to whom we were tied, to preserve us in case of our falling. I am not entirely convinced, that if one of us had had the misfortune to fall, and were slipping down the declivity, he would not have drawn his two companions, in spite of these precautions, over the precipice. To add to our difficulties, the sun was excessively bright, and almost blinded us, notwithstanding the gauze veils with which we were all provided.

Fortunately, we met with but few crevices; however, on passing one of these that was hid by the snow, I suddenly sunk, but my body being thrown forward by this motion, my breast opposed a larger surface to the snow which thus supported me, and I was easily extricated by a guide. On looking back through the hole I had broken, I could perceive the black cavity beneath.

At one period, our path necessarily led us close under a wall of snow, more than 150 feet high, from the top of which projected several large masses of snow, that appeared to require only a touch to bring them down on our heads. Our captain pointed out our danger, and enjoined us to pass as quickly as possible, and to observe the strictest silence. When we looked up at these

————— Toppling crags of ice,
The avalanches, whom a breath draws down
In mountainous o'erwhelming,

we felt no disposition to disobey his directions, but passed on with hurried step, and in the

stillness of death. The inhabitants of those parts of the Alps, exposed to these avalanches, assert that the concussion of the air, produced by the voice, is often sufficient to loosen, and bring down their immense masses. Hence the muleteer is often seen to take the bells from his animals, when he passes through a valley subject to this danger. A few years since some young men, relying on the solidity of the ice, and wishing to try the echo, were so imprudent as to discharge a pistol in a large cave which is at the lower edge of the glacier des Bois, near Chamouny. The shock brought down the roof, which crushed them on the spot.

At 11 o'clock we had passed most of the difficulties, and all the dangers of our ascent, and reached a granite rock, which appears or nipple, which forms the summit of Mont Blanc. This rock is only 1000 feet lower than the summit. Here we enjoyed a full view of the valley and village of Chamouny, which had hitherto been masked by the 'Aiguille du Midi;' and when we recollected the promises of our friends there, to watch our progress with their glasses, and were convinced that they were at that moment observing us, we felt relieved from the sensation which we had previously experienced, of being shut out from the world. In fact, we learned afterwards, that they had seen us distinctly, counted our number, and observed that one of the party was missing: this was the guide we had left at the 'plateau.'

Our final object was now close at hand. We turned, with renewed ardor, to accomplish it; continuing our zigzag path, till, after much suffering from fatigue, cold, and shortness of breath, we stood, at half an hour after noon, on the highest point of Europe!

Our first impulse, on arriving, was to enjoy the pleasure of throwing our eyes around, without encountering any obstacle. The world was at our feet. The sensations I felt were rather those of awe, than of sublimity. It seemed that I no longer trod on this globe, but that I was removed to some higher planet, from which I could look down on a scene which I had lately inhabited, and where I had left behind me the passions, the sufferings, and the vices of men. The houses of Chamouny, appeared like dwellings of ants, and the river which flows through the valley, seemed not sufficient to drown one of these pigmy animals. These emotions made me for some time insensible to the cold, but the piercing wind, which here had free scope, soon put an end to my waking dream, and bringing me back to the reality of life, enabled me to fix my attention on the objects around.

Notwithstanding the pleasure inspired by the view, it was certainly more terrific than beautiful. The distant objects appeared as if covered by a veil. To the north-west was the chain of Jura, with a mist hanging on its whole extent, which prevented the eye from penetrating into France, in that direction. On the north was the lake of Geneva; of a black colour, and surrounded by mountains, which we had thought high, while we were on its banks, but which now appeared insignificant, and the lake itself seemed scarcely capacious enough to bathe in. To the east were the only mountains that appeared of a considerable size; among which, the most conspicuous were the Jungfrau and Schreckhorn in Grindelwalden, and Monte Rosa, on the borders of Piedmont, which raises its hoary and magnificent head to within a few hundred feet of the level of Mont Blanc. The grand St. Bernard was at our feet, to the south east, scarcely appearing to rise to more than a mole hill's height above the adjoining vallies. The obstacles which Bonaparte had to encounter in leading his army over this mountain, even in winter, appeared so diminished in our eyes, that this vaunted undertaking lost, at the moment, in our estimation, much of its heroism and grandeur.

The view below and immediately around, presented a shapeless collection of craggy points, among which the 'Needles' were easily distinguished. We could hardly trust our senses, when we saw, beneath our feet, those rocks which, from below, appear higher than Mont Blanc itself, and which seem to penetrate into the region of the stars, and to threaten to 'disturb the moon in passing by.' Our view may be compared with that from the top of an elevated steeple over an extensive city, of which, except in the immediate neighbourhood, the roof only of the various buildings which compose it, are to be seen. The only green that we could perceive, was the narrow valley of Chamouny, and the two vallies by the side of St. Bernard. The portion of the earth that was not covered with snow, appeared of a gloomy and dark grey colour. The world presented an image of chaos, and offered but little to tempt our return to it.

The top of Mont Blanc is a ridge of perhaps 150 feet in length, and six or eight in breadth. It is entirely composed of snow, which is probably of immense depth, and is constantly accumulating. We could see no traces of the obelisk, 12 feet in height, which had been set up about ten years before. One of our guides was of the number of those who placed it, and designated to us its position. The highest rock which appears above the snow, is a small one of granite, 600 feet below the summit. We remained but a few minutes immediately on the top, as the wind blew hard and piercingly cold. Descending a few feet on the south side, we were partially sheltered from the wind, and here the sun shone with an excessive brightness, heating every part of the body exposed to his rays; but the least breath of wind, which reached us at intervals, was sufficient to make us shiver with cold. Fahrenheit's thermometer in the sun, was two degrees below freezing, and five and a half in the shade. It must be considered, however, that we suffered a much greater degree of cold than the thermometer indicated, from the rapid evaporation from the surface of our bodies, of the insensible transpiration occasioned by the dryness and great rarity of the surrounding air. This cause, familiar to physiologists, affected our sensations, and could not influence the thermometer. Most of our guides stretched themselves on the snow in the sun, and yielded to the strong inclination to sleep, which we all felt. Only one or two of them ate: the others, on the contrary, evinced an aversion to all kinds of food. We did not suffer the great thirst which Saussure and his party experienced; This we prevented by drinking vinegar and water, which was very grateful to us, instead of pure water. Our pulses were increased in frequency and

fulness, and we had all the symptoms of fever. I occupied myself, notwithstanding the indisposition to action which I felt, in making a few observations, and in stopping and sealing very carefully a bottle which I had filled with the air of the summit, intended for examination on my return.

The colour of the sky had gradually assumed a deeper tint of blue as we ascended: its present colour was dark indigo, approaching nearly to black. There was something awful in this appearance, so different from any we had ever witnessed. There was nothing to which we could compare it, except to the sun shining at midnight. During some of the first attempts that were made to ascend Mont Blanc, this appearance produced so strong an effect on the minds of the guides, who imagined that Heaven was frowning on their undertaking, that they refused to proceed. The portion of atmosphere above us was entirely free from the vapours which the lower strata always contain, and was truly the 'pure empyreal,' seldom seen by mortal eyes. We had all our life beheld the sun through a mist, but we now saw him, face to face, in all his splendour. The guides asserted that the stars can be seen, in full day, by a person placed in the shade. It being near noon, and the sun almost over our heads, we could not find shadow to enable us to make the experiment.

The air on the top of Mont Blanc is of but little more than half the density of that at the surface of the ocean. According to the observations of Saussure, the height of the barometer on the summit, was sixteen and a half inches, while that of a corresponding one at Geneva, was twenty-eight inches. In consequence of this rarity of the air, a pistol, heavily charged, which we fired several times, made scarcely more noise than the crack of a postillion's whip.

We remained an hour and a quarter on the summit, part of which time was spent in useless regrets at not having waited to provide ourselves with instruments, as we were now so admirably situated to make with them a series of interesting experiments. Those which had suggested themselves, were principally concerning the absorption and radiation of caloric, and on the degree of cold produced by the evaporation of æther and other liquids. We found the descent more easy and much less fatiguing, though perhaps more dangerous than the ascent, on account of the greater risk of slipping. We passed under the place where the avalanche threatened us, with even more caution and more rapidity than before, as we found that a small piece had actually fallen, and covered our path since we had passed by. We arrived in about an hour at the 'Grand Plateau,' where we stopped to refresh ourselves, and gratify our returning appetites. We found the guide whom we had left, quite relieved. Here the sun, reflected from the walls of snow which surrounded us on three sides, poured down upon us with the most burning heat that I ever experienced from its rays, while our feet, cold from being immersed in the snow, prevented perspiration, and thus increased its power. Wherever its rays could penetrate, as between the cap and neckcloth, or even to the hands, it resembled the application of a heated iron. We were compelled, in addition to the assistance of our veils, to keep our eyes half closed, and even then the light was too powerful for them.

We however continued with ease and cheerfulness our descent, until an unexpected difficulty occurred. Where in the morning we had cut our footsteps with an axe, we now found the snow so much softened by the sun, that we sunk in it every third or fourth step, to the middle of the body. My friend and myself were more subject to this inconvenience than the guides, on account of the soles of our boots presenting a less surface to the snow, than those of their large shoes. After plunging on in this manner for some time, I began to despair of reaching our rock, which was yet four or five miles distant: but there was no alternative but to proceed. We therefore kept on, though with excessive fatigue. We frequently fell forward, and one limb being tightly engaged in the snow, was violently twisted, and constantly liable to be sprained; which in our situation would have been a serious misfortune. The crevices too were, from their edges having become softened, more dangerous than before. Perseverance and caution, however, triumphed over all these difficulties, and we reached the 'Grand Mulet,' half an hour after five, our boots, stockings, and pantaloons completely soaked. These were immediately stretched on the rock to dry, which the heat of the sun soon effected. I had the disappointment to find, on examining my pockets, that the bottle which I had so carefully filled with the air of the summit, had been broken in one of my frequent falls, and of course my hopes of making with it some interesting experiments, were now destroyed. The thermometer was also broken.

Notwithstanding the Herculean labour of the day, and the fatigue we experienced at the time, we had not been long on our rock before we felt strong and invigorated, as if just risen from a comfortable night's repose. This effect of the mountain air has often been remarked. We had even sufficient strength, and ample time to enable us to continue our descent with ease to Chamouny; but in the present softened state of the snow it would have been madness to attempt to cross the glacier, which we had found difficult and dangerous the preceding day, even before the sun's rays had affected it. In fact, while two of the guides were looking down on our path over the glacier, they saw a bridge of snow which we all crossed the day before, suddenly sink into the chasm beneath.

Imprisoned thus by the glacier, which was now all that intervened betwixt us and terra firma, we quietly resolved to remain where we were, and made the same arrangements for passing the night, as we had done the evening before. We were, however, at present better off: I mentioned that we had been so fortunate as to find a sufficient supply of water in the neighbourhood of our rock, in consequence of which most of the charcoal, we had brought to melt the snow, remained. With this we made a small fire at our feet, and by blowing almost constantly, kept it up during the night. It has been often observed, that as we ascend in the atmosphere, the difficulty of

maintaining combustion, is proportionably increased. The cold was notwithstanding our fire, so great, that whenever I fell asleep, I was awakened in a few minutes to shiver and chatter my teeth. Our guides slept in the open air, huddled as close together as possible.

July 13th.—The dawning of the day was truly welcome, as it promised a near termination to our toils and suffering, while the gratification of having accomplished a difficult and interesting object remained as a recompense. We left our hard bed without reluctance, and were impatient at the slowness with which the guides made their preparations in packing up their numerous articles. We began to descend as the sun illumined the white top of Mont Blanc, but long before his beams penetrated below. Above our heads the sky was perfectly clear, while the vallies beneath, and all except a few of the highest surrounding mountains, were concealed by a sea of clouds. The appearance of the clouds when seen from above is singular; they resemble immense floating masses of light carded cotton. We retraced our path of the first day, and took the same precaution as then of tying ourselves together. When the sun's rays began to shine on the snow around us, I found that my eyes were so much inflamed, I could scarcely bear them sufficiently open to see the path; notwithstanding the gauze veil I had constantly used, my face was in a terrible condition: the outer skin had fallen, rendering my chin and lips one continued sore. Doctor Van Rensselaer's eyes were in a worse condition than mine, and his face nearly as bad.

At one part of the glacier where the snow had been so hard at our passing, that our feet left no impression, we lost our path, which was a misfortune, as we had chosen a much better path in ascending, than we could have done in descending. We however fell in with the track of two chamois, which our guides followed with confidence, relying on the instinct, which they attribute to these animals, of finding a practicable path over the most difficult glaciers. When we had at last past the glacier, our feet seemed to rejoice at once more touching firm ground; and we felt as if returning to the world from a distant voyage. The rest of our task offered no difficulty, being a constant descent down the rocky mountain side, except what was occasioned by our almost total blindness, and the pain we suffered in our eyes. It was however very fatiguing, as the descent from a mountain is generally more so than the ascent to it. We stopped at the same Chalet, where two days before we had bid adieu to the world; and were regaled by the old man and his daughters with another delicious draught of milk and cream. We reached the village soon after ten o'clock in the morning, having been absent fifty-three hours, during forty-five of which we were on the ice. We were received with many congratulations by the honest villagers, who had taken considerable interest in our success.

As soon as my companion and myself reached our inn, we buried ourselves in our chamber, to enjoy the luxury of a bed, and of darkness, which was necessary for our eyes. It was not until the sun had set, and the twilight was not too strong for them, that we ventured out to regale ourselves with a comfortable meal. Two English visitors, who had watched with a glass our progress on the top of Mont Blanc, had expressed a determination to follow our example; but our account of the difficulties we met with, and still more the view of the condition we were in, soon induced them to abandon the design. We walked out at the approach of night under the "Needles," and as we saw these rocks, on whose sides

——— the clouds
Pause to repose themselves in passing by,

and on whose tops the stars seemed to rest, we could scarcely realize the idea that they were the same we had seen only thirty hours before, far below our feet.

The next day after our return to Chamouny, our eyes had become so much stronger, that we were enabled, without much inconvenience, to proceed to Geneva, where we have since remained to recover from our sufferings. Though now more than a week has elapsed, my face is yet much inflamed; but my eyes have regained their usual strength. Dr. Van Rensselaer has suffered in the same manner, but on the whole rather less than myself. Wherever the sun's rays could penetrate, even behind the ears to the level of the neckcloth, the skin has fallen off, and I have exchanged the tawny hue of an Italian and Sicilian sun, for the fair complexion of a German or Englishman. We have purchased perhaps too dearly the indulgence of our curiosity; but at present, when the difficulties are passed, and the gratification remains, I cannot regret our hardships, especially if I succeed in making you partake of the one, without suffering from the other.

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

Other than the corrections listed below, printer's inconsistencies in spelling and punctuation usage have been retained:

- "Bourrit" corrected to "Bouritt" (page 12)
- "representa-ons" corrected to "representations" (page 15)
- "breath" corrected to "breadth" (page 20)
- "visiters" corrected to "visitors" (page 47)

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