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A TRAMP ABROAD BY MARK TWAIN, Part 6

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ABROAD

BY
MARK TWAIN.

ILLUSTRATED

AMERICAN
PUBLISHING
COMPANY
HARTFORD
CONN.



by
MARK
TWIN.



Yr truly
Mark Twain
—



TITIAN'S MOSES.

A TRAMP ABROAD;

ILLUSTRATED BY W. FR. BROWN, TRUE WILLIAMS, B. DAY AND OTHER
ARTISTS—WITH ALSO THREE OR FOUR PICTURES MADE BY
THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK, WITHOUT OUTSIDE HELP;
IN ALL

THREE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS.

BY
MARK TWAIN,
(SAMUEL L. CLEMENS.)

(SOLD BY SUBSCRIPTION ONLY.)

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A TRAMP ABROAD, Part 6.

By Mark Twain

(Samuel L. Clemens)

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ILLUSTRATIONS:

1. [PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR](#)
2. [TITIAN'S MOSES](#)
3. [THE AUTHOR'S MEMORIES](#)
236. [A SUNDAY MORNING'S DEMON](#)
237. [JUST SAVED](#)
238. [SCENE IN VALLEY OF ZERMATT](#)
239. [ARRIVAL AT ZERMATT](#)
240. [FITTED OUT](#)
241. [A FEARFUL FALL](#)
242. [TAIL PIECE](#)
243. [ALL READY](#)
244. [THE MARCH](#)
245. [THE CARAVAN](#)
246. [THE HOOK](#)
247. [THE DISABLED CHAPLAIN](#)
248. [TRYING EXPERIMENTS](#)
249. [SAVED! SAVED!](#)
250. [TWENTY MINUTES WORK](#)
251. [THE BLACK RAM](#)
252. [THE MIRACLE](#)
253. [THE NEW GUIDE](#)
251. [SCIENTIFIC RESEARCHES](#)
255. [MOUNTAIN CHALET](#)
256. [THE GRANDSON](#)
257. [OCCASIONLY MET WITH](#)
258. [SUMMIT OF THE GORNER GRAT](#)
259. [CHIEFS OF THE ADVANCE GUARD](#)
260. [MY PICTURE OF THE MATTERHORN](#)
261. [EVERYBODY HAD AN EXCUSE](#)
262. [SPRUNG A LEAK](#)
263. [A SCIENTIFIC QUESTION](#)
264. [A TERMINAL MORAINE](#)
265. [FRONT OF GLACIER](#)
266. [AN OLD MORAINE](#)
267. [GLACIER OF ZERMATT WITH LATERAL MORAINE](#)
269. [UNEXPECTED MEETING OF FRIENDS](#)
269. [VILLAGE OF CHAMONIX](#)
270. [THE MATTERHORN](#)
271. [ON THE SUMMIT](#)
272. [ACCIDENT ON THE MATTERHORN \(1865\)](#)
273. [ROPED TOGETHER](#)
274. [STORAGE OF ANCESTORS](#)
275. [FALLING OUT OF HIS FARM](#)
276. [CHILD LIFE IN SWITZERLAND](#)
277. [A SUNDAY PLAY](#)
278. [THE COMBINATION](#)
279. [CHILLON](#)
280. [THE TETE NOIR](#)
281. [MONT BLANC'S NEIGHBORS](#)
282. [AN EXQUISITE THING](#)
283. [A WILD RIDE](#)
284. [SWISS PEASANT GIRL](#)

CONTENTS:

[CHAPTER XXXVI](#)

Sunday Church Bells—A Cause of Profanity—A Magnificent Glacier—Fault Finding by Harris—Almost an Accident—Selfishness of Harris—Approaching Zermatt—The Matterhorn—Zermatt—Home of Mountain Climbers—Fitted out for Climbing—A Fearful Adventure —Never Satisfied

[CHAPTER XXXVII](#)

A Calm Decision—"I Will Ascend the Riffelberg"—Preparations for the Trip—All Zermatt on the Alert—Schedule of Persons and Things—An Unprecedented Display—A General Turn—out—Ready for a Start—The Post of Danger—The Advance Directed—Grand Display of Umbrellas—The First Camp—Almost a Panic—Supposed to be Lost—The First Accident—A Chaplain Disabled—An Experimenting Mule—Good Effects of a Blunder—Badly Lost—A Reconnoiter—Mystery and Doubt—Stern Measures Taken—A

[CHAPTER XXXVIII](#)

Our Expedition Continued—Experiments with the Barometer—Boiling Thermometer—Barometer Soup—An Interesting Scientific Discovery—Crippling a Latinist—A Chaplain Injured—Short of Barkeepers—Digging a Mountain Cellar—A Young American Specimen—Somebody's Grandson—Arrival at Riffelberg Botel—Ascent of Gorner Grat—Faith in Thermometers—The Matterhorn

[CHAPTER XXXIX](#)

Guide Books—Plans for the Return of the Expedition—A Glacier Train—Parachute Descent from Gorner Grat—Proposed Honors to Harris Declined—All had an Excuse—A Magnificent Idea Abandoned—Descent to the Glacier—A Supposed Leak—A Slow Train—The Glacier Abandoned—Journey to Zermatt—A Scientific Question

[CHAPTER XL](#)

Glaciers—Glacier Perils—Moraines—Terminal Moraines—Lateral Moraines—Immense Size of Glacier—Traveling Glacier—General Movements of Glaciers—Ascent of Mont Blanc—Loss of Guides—Finding of Remains—Meeting of Old Friends—The Dead and Living—Proposed Museum—The Relics at Chamonix

[CHAPTER XLI](#)

The Matterhorn Catastrophe of 1563—Mr Whymper's Narrative—Ascent of the Matterhorn—The Summit—The Matterhorn Conquered—The Descent Commenced—A Fearful Disaster—Death of Lord Douglas and Two Others—The Graves of the Two

[CHAPTER XLII](#)

Switzerland—Graveyard at Zermatt—Balloting for Marriage—Farmers as Heroes—Falling off a Farm—From St Nicholas to Visp—Dangerous Traveling—Children's Play—The Parson's Children—A Landlord's Daughter—A Rare Combination—Chillon—Lost Sympathy—Mont Blanc and its Neighbors—Beauty of Soap Bubbles—A Wild Drive—The King of Drivers—Benefit of getting Drunk



CHAPTER XXXVI

[The Fiendish Fun of Alp-climbing]

We did not oversleep at St. Nicholas. The church-bell began to ring at four-thirty in the morning, and from the length of time it continued to ring I judged that it takes the Swiss sinner a good while to get the invitation through his head. Most church-bells in the world are of poor quality, and have a harsh and rasping sound which upsets the temper and produces much sin, but the St. Nicholas bell is a good deal the worst one that has been contrived yet, and is peculiarly maddening in its operation. Still, it may have its right and its excuse to exist, for the community

is poor and not every citizen can afford a clock, perhaps; but there cannot be any excuse for our church-bells at home, for there is no family in America without a clock, and consequently there is no fair pretext for the usual Sunday medley of dreadful sounds that issues from our steeples. There is much more profanity in America on Sunday than in all in the other six days of the week put together, and it is of a more bitter and malignant character than the week-day profanity, too. It is produced by the cracked-pot clangor of the cheap church-bells.



We build our churches almost without regard to cost; we rear an edifice which is an adornment to the town, and we gild it, and fresco it, and mortgage it, and do everything we can think of to perfect it, and then spoil it all by putting a bell on it which afflicts everybody who hears it, giving some the headache, others St. Vitus's dance, and the rest the blind staggers.

An American village at ten o'clock on a summer Sunday is the quietest and peaceablest and holiest thing in nature; but it is a pretty different thing half an hour later. Mr. Poe's poem of the "Bells" stands incomplete to this day; but it is well enough that it is so, for the public reciter or "reader" who goes around trying to imitate the sounds of the various sorts of bells with his voice would find himself "up a stump" when he got to the church-bell—as Joseph Addison would say. The church is always trying to get other people to reform; it might not be a bad idea to reform itself a little, by way of example. It is still clinging to one or two things which were useful once, but which are not useful now, neither are they ornamental. One is the bell-ringing to remind a clock-caked town that it is church-time, and another is the reading from the pulpit of a tedious list of "notices" which everybody who is interested has already read in the newspaper. The clergyman even reads the hymn through—a relic of an ancient time when hymn-books are scarce and costly; but everybody has a hymn-book, now, and so the public reading is no longer necessary. It is not merely unnecessary, it is generally painful; for the average clergyman could not fire into his congregation with a shotgun and hit a worse reader than himself, unless the weapon scattered shamefully. I am not meaning to be flippant and irreverent, I am only meaning to be truthful. The average clergyman, in all countries and of all denominations, is a very bad reader. One would think he would at least learn how to read the Lord's Prayer, by and by, but it is not so. He races through it as if he thought the quicker he got it in, the sooner it would be answered. A person who does not appreciate the exceeding value of pauses, and does not know how to measure their duration judiciously, cannot render the grand simplicity and dignity of a

composition like that effectively.

We took a tolerably early breakfast, and tramped off toward Zermatt through the reeking lanes of the village, glad to get away from that bell. By and by we had a fine spectacle on our right. It was the wall-like butt end of a huge glacier, which looked down on us from an Alpine height which was well up in the blue sky. It was an astonishing amount of ice to be compacted together in one mass. We ciphered upon it and decided that it was not less than several hundred feet from the base of the wall of solid ice to the top of it—Harris believed it was really twice that. We judged that if St. Paul's, St. Peter's, the Great Pyramid, the Strasburg Cathedral and the Capitol in Washington were clustered against that wall, a man sitting on its upper edge could not hang his hat on the top of any one of them without reaching down three or four hundred feet—a thing which, of course, no man could do.

To me, that mighty glacier was very beautiful. I did not imagine that anybody could find fault with it; but I was mistaken. Harris had been snarling for several days. He was a rabid Protestant, and he was always saying:

"In the Protestant cantons you never see such poverty and dirt and squalor as you do in this Catholic one; you never see the lanes and alleys flowing with foulness; you never see such wretched little sties of houses; you never see an inverted tin turnip on top of a church for a dome; and as for a church-bell, why, you never hear a church-bell at all."

All this morning he had been finding fault, straight along. First it was with the mud. He said, "It ain't muddy in a Protestant canton when it rains." Then it was with the dogs: "They don't have those lop-eared dogs in a Protestant canton." Then it was with the roads: "They don't leave the roads to make themselves in a Protestant canton, the people make them—and they make a road that IS a road, too." Next it was the goats: "You never see a goat shedding tears in a Protestant canton—a goat, there, is one of the cheerfulest objects in nature." Next it was the chamois: "You never see a Protestant chamois act like one of these—they take a bite or two and go; but these fellows camp with you and stay." Then it was the guide-boards: "In a Protestant canton you couldn't get lost if you wanted to, but you never see a guide-board in a Catholic canton." Next, "You never see any flower-boxes in the windows, here—never anything but now and then a cat—a torpid one; but you take a Protestant canton: windows perfectly lovely with flowers—and as for cats, there's just acres of them. These folks in this canton leave a road to make itself, and then fine you three francs if you 'trot' over it—as if a horse could trot over such a sarcasm of a road." Next about the goiter: "THEY talk about goiter!—I haven't seen a goiter in this whole canton that I couldn't put in a hat."

He had growled at everything, but I judged it would puzzle him to find anything the matter with this majestic glacier. I intimated as much; but he was ready, and said with surly discontent: "You ought to see them in the Protestant cantons."

This irritated me. But I concealed the feeling, and asked:

"What is the matter with this one?"

"Matter? Why, it ain't in any kind of condition. They never take any care of a glacier here. The moraine has been spilling gravel around it, and got it all dirty."

"Why, man, THEY can't help that."

"THEY? You're right. That is, they WON'T. They could if they wanted to. You never see a speck of dirt on a Protestant glacier. Look at the Rhone glacier. It is fifteen miles long, and seven hundred feet thick. If this was a Protestant glacier you wouldn't see it looking like this, I can tell you."

"That is nonsense. What would they do with it?"

"They would whitewash it. They always do."

I did not believe a word of this, but rather than have trouble I let it go; for it is a waste of breath to argue with a bigot. I even doubted if the Rhone glacier WAS in a Protestant canton; but I did not know, so I could not make anything by contradicting a man who would probably put me down at once with manufactured evidence.

About nine miles from St. Nicholas we crossed a bridge over the raging torrent of the Visp, and came to a log strip of flimsy fencing which was pretending to secure people from tumbling over a perpendicular wall forty feet high and into the river. Three children were approaching; one of them, a little girl, about eight years old, was running; when pretty close to us she stumbled and fell, and her feet shot under the rail of the fence and for a moment projected over the stream. It gave us a sharp shock, for we thought she was gone, sure, for the ground slanted steeply, and to save herself seemed a sheer impossibility; but she managed to scramble up, and ran by us laughing.

We went forward and examined the place and saw the long tracks which her feet had made in the dirt when they darted over the verge. If she had finished her trip she would have struck some big rocks in the edge of the water, and then the torrent would have snatched her downstream among the half-covered boulders and she would have been pounded to pulp in two minutes. We had come exceedingly near witnessing her death.



And now Harris's contrary nature and inborn selfishness were strikingly manifested. He has no spirit of self-denial. He began straight off, and continued for an hour, to express his gratitude that the child was not destroyed. I never saw such a man. That was the kind of person he was; just so HE was gratified, he never cared anything about anybody else. I had noticed that trait in him, over and over again. Often, of course, it was mere heedlessness, mere want of reflection. Doubtless this may have been the case in most instances, but it was not the less hard to bar on that account—and after all, its bottom, its groundwork, was selfishness. There is no avoiding that conclusion. In the instance under consideration, I did think the indecency of running on in that way might occur to him; but no, the child was saved and he was glad, that was sufficient—he cared not a straw for MY feelings, or my loss of such a literary plum, snatched from my very mouth at the instant it was ready to drop into it. His selfishness was sufficient to place his own gratification in being spared suffering clear before all concern for me, his friend. Apparently, he did not once reflect upon the valuable details which would have fallen like a windfall to me: fishing the child out—witnessing the surprise of the family and the stir the thing would have made among the peasants—then a Swiss funeral—then the roadside monument, to be paid for by us and have our names mentioned in it. And we should have gone into Baedeker and been immortal. I was silent. I was too much hurt to complain. If he could act so, and be so heedless and so frivolous at such a time, and actually seem to glory in it, after all I had done for him, I would have cut my hand off before I would let him see that I was wounded.



VIEW IN VALLEY OF ZERMATT.

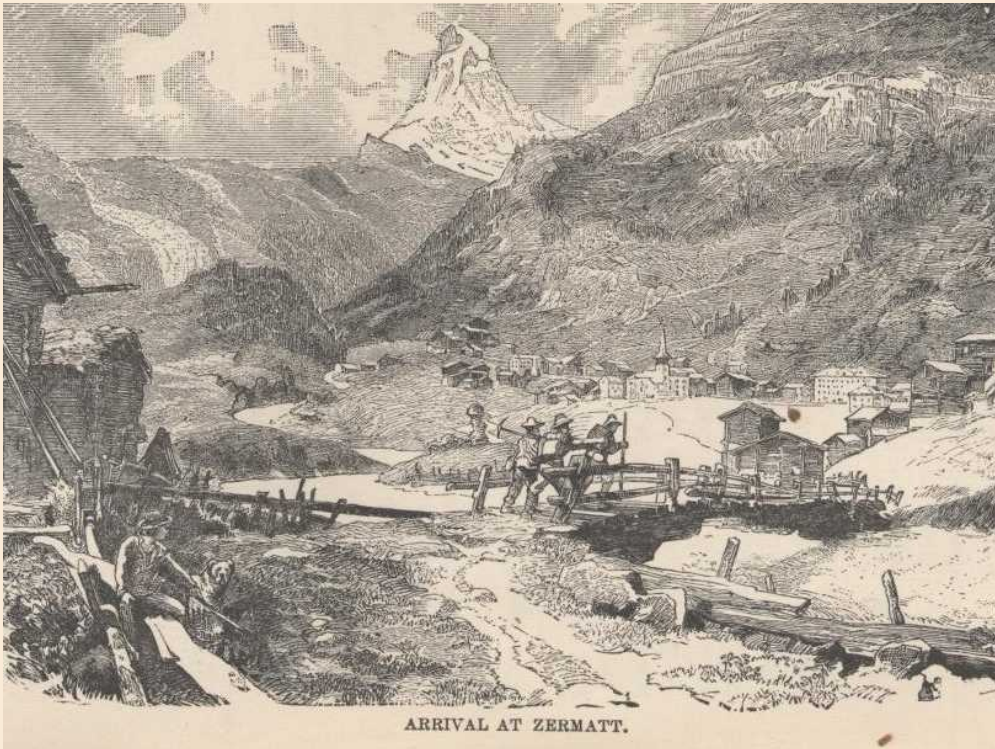
We were approaching Zermatt; consequently, we were approaching the renowned Matterhorn. A month before, this mountain had been only a name to us, but latterly we had been moving through a steadily thickening double row of pictures of it, done in oil, water, chromo, wood, steel, copper, crayon, and photography, and so it had at length become a shape to us—and a very distinct, decided, and familiar one, too. We were expecting to recognize that mountain whenever or wherever we should run across it. We were not deceived. The monarch was far away when we first saw him, but there was no such thing as mistaking him. He has the rare peculiarity of standing by himself; he is peculiarly steep, too, and is also most oddly shaped. He towers into the sky like a colossal wedge, with the upper third of its blade bent a little to the left. The broad base of this monster wedge is planted upon a grand glacier-paved Alpine platform whose elevation is ten thousand feet above sea-level; as the wedge itself is some five thousand feet high, it follows that its apex is about fifteen thousand feet above sea-level. So the whole bulk of this stately piece of rock, this sky-cleaving monolith, is above the line of eternal snow. Yet while all its giant neighbors have the look of being built of solid snow, from their waists up, the Matterhorn stands black and naked and forbidding, the year round, or merely powdered or streaked with white in places, for its sides are so steep that the snow cannot stay there. Its strange form, its august isolation, and its majestic unkinship with its own kind, make it—so to speak—the Napoleon of the mountain world. "Grand, gloomy, and peculiar," is a phrase which fits it as aptly as it fitted the great captain.

Think of a monument a mile high, standing on a pedestal two miles high! This is what the Matterhorn is—a monument. Its office, henceforth, for all time, will be to keep watch and ward over the secret resting-place of the young Lord Douglas, who, in 1865, was precipitated from the summit over a precipice four thousand feet high, and never seen again. No man ever had such a monument as this before; the most imposing of the world's other monuments are but atoms compared to it; and they will perish, and their places will pass from memory, but this will remain.

[The accident which cost Lord Douglas his life (see Chapter xii) also cost the lives of three other men. These three fell four-fifths of a mile, and their bodies were afterward found, lying side by side, upon a glacier, whence they were borne to Zermatt and buried in the churchyard.

The remains of Lord Douglas have never been found. The secret of his sepulture, like that of Moses, must remain a mystery always.]

A walk from St. Nicholas to Zermatt is a wonderful experience. Nature is built on a stupendous plan in that region. One marches continually between walls that are piled into the skies, with their upper heights broken into a confusion of sublime shapes that gleam white and cold against the background of blue; and here and there one sees a big glacier displaying its grandeurs on the top of a precipice, or a graceful cascade leaping and flashing down the green declivities. There is nothing tame, or cheap, or trivial—it is all magnificent. That short valley is a picture-gallery of a notable kind, for it contains no mediocrities; from end to end the Creator has hung it with His masterpieces.



ARRIVAL AT ZERMATT.

We made Zermatt at three in the afternoon, nine hours out from St. Nicholas. Distance, by guide-book, twelve miles; by pedometer seventy-two. We were in the heart and home of the mountain-climbers, now, as all visible things testified. The snow-peaks did not hold themselves aloof, in aristocratic reserve; they nestled close around, in a friendly, sociable way; guides, with the ropes and axes and other implements of their fearful calling slung about their persons, roosted in a long line upon a stone wall in front of the hotel, and waited for customers; sun-burnt climbers, in mountaineering costume, and followed by their guides and porters, arrived from time to time, from breakneck expeditions among the peaks and glaciers of the High Alps; male and female tourists, on mules, filed by, in a continuous procession, hotelward-bound from wild adventures which would grow in grandeur every time they were described at the English or American fireside, and at last outgrow the possible itself.

We were not dreaming; this was not a make-believe home of the Alp-climber, created by our heated imaginations; no, for here was Mr. Girdlestone himself, the famous Englishman who hunts his way to the most formidable Alpine summits without a guide. I was not equal to imagining a Girdlestone; it was all I could do to even realize him, while looking straight at him at short range.

I would rather face whole Hyde Parks of artillery than the ghastly forms of death which he has faced among the peaks and precipices of the mountains. There is probably no pleasure equal to the pleasure of climbing a dangerous Alp; but it is a pleasure which is confined strictly to people who can find pleasure in it. I have not jumped to this conclusion; I have traveled to it per gravel-train, so to speak. I have thought the thing all out, and am quite sure I am right. A born climber's appetite for climbing is hard to satisfy; when it comes upon him he is like a starving man with a feast before him; he may have other business on hand, but it must wait. Mr. Girdlestone had had his usual summer holiday in the Alps, and had spent it in his usual way, hunting for unique chances to break his neck; his vacation was over, and his luggage packed for England, but all of a sudden a hunger had come upon him to climb the tremendous Weisshorn once more, for he had heard of a new and utterly impossible route up it. His baggage was unpacked at once, and now he and a friend, laden with knapsacks, ice-axes, coils of rope, and canteens of milk, were just setting out. They would spend the night high up among the snows, somewhere, and get up at two in the morning and finish the enterprise. I had a strong desire to go with them, but forced it down—a feat which Mr. Girdlestone, with all his fortitude, could not do.

Even ladies catch the climbing mania, and are unable to throw it off. A famous climber, of that sex, had attempted the Weisshorn a few days before our arrival, and she and her guides had lost their way in a snow-storm high up among the peaks and glaciers and been forced to wander around a good while before they could find a way down. When this lady reached the bottom, she had been on her feet twenty-three hours!

Our guides, hired on the Gemmi, were already at Zermatt when we reached there. So there was nothing to interfere with our getting up an adventure whenever we should choose the time and the object. I resolved to devote my first evening in Zermatt to studying up the subject of Alpine climbing, by way of preparation.

I read several books, and here are some of the things I found out. One's shoes must be strong and heavy, and have pointed hobnails in them. The alpenstock must be of the best wood, for if it should break, loss of life might be the result. One should carry an ax, to cut steps in the ice with, on the great heights. There must be a ladder, for there are steep bits of rock which can be surmounted with this instrument—or this utensil—but could not be surmounted without it; such an obstruction has compelled the tourist to waste hours hunting another route, when a ladder would have saved him all trouble. One must have from one hundred and fifty to five hundred feet of strong rope, to be used in lowering the party down steep declivities which are too steep and smooth to be traversed in any other way. One must have a steel hook, on another rope—a very useful thing; for when one is ascending and comes to a low bluff which is yet too high for the ladder, he swings this rope aloft like a lasso, the hook catches at the top of the bluff, and then the tourist climbs the rope, hand over hand—being always particular to try and forget that if the hook gives way he will never stop falling till he arrives in some part of Switzerland where they are not expecting him. Another important thing—there must be a rope to tie the whole party together with, so that if one falls from a mountain or down a bottomless chasm in a glacier, the others may brace back on the rope and save him. One must have a silk veil, to protect his face from snow, sleet, hail and gale, and colored goggles to protect his eyes from that dangerous enemy, snow-blindness. Finally, there must be some porters, to carry provisions, wine and scientific instruments, and also blanket bags for the party to sleep in.



I closed my readings with a fearful adventure which Mr. Whymper once had on the Matterhorn when he was prowling around alone, five thousand feet above the town of Breil. He was edging his way gingerly around the corner of a precipice where the upper edge of a sharp declivity of ice-glazed snow joined it. This declivity swept down a couple of hundred feet, into a gully which curved around and ended at a precipice eight hundred feet high, overlooking a glacier. His foot slipped, and he fell.

He says:

"My knapsack brought my head down first, and I pitched into some rocks about a dozen feet below; they caught something, and tumbled me off the edge, head over heels, into the gully; the baton was dashed from my hands, and I whirled downward in a series of bounds, each longer than the last; now over ice, now into rocks, striking my head four or five times, each time with increased force. The last bound sent me spinning through the air in a leap of fifty or sixty feet, from one side of the gully to the other, and I struck the rocks, luckily, with the whole of my left side. They caught my clothes for a moment, and I fell back on to the snow with motion arrested. My head fortunately came the right side up, and a few frantic catches brought me to a halt, in the neck of the gully and on the verge of the precipice. Baton, hat, and veil skimmed by and disappeared, and the crash of the rocks—which I had started—as they fell on to the glacier, told how narrow had been the escape from utter destruction. As it was, I fell nearly two hundred feet in seven or eight bounds. Ten feet more would have taken me in one gigantic leap of eight hundred feet on to the glacier below.



"The situation was sufficiently serious. The rocks could not be let go for a moment, and the blood was spurting out of more than twenty cuts. The most serious ones were in the head, and I vainly tried to close them with one hand, while holding on with the other. It was useless; the blood gushed out in blinding jets at each pulsation. At last, in a moment of inspiration, I kicked out a big lump of snow and struck it as plaster on my head. The idea was a happy one, and the flow of blood diminished. Then, scrambling up, I got, not a moment too soon, to a place of safety, and fainted away. The sun was setting when consciousness returned, and it was pitch-dark before the Great Staircase was descended; but by a combination of luck and care, the whole four thousand seven hundred feet of descent to Breil was accomplished without a slip, or once missing the way."

His wounds kept him abed some days. Then he got up and climbed that mountain again. That is the way with a true Alp-climber; the more fun he has, the more he wants.



CHAPTER XXXVII

[Our Imposing Column Starts Upward]

After I had finished my readings, I was no longer myself; I was tranced, uplifted, intoxicated, by the almost incredible perils and adventures I had been following my authors through, and the triumphs I had been sharing with them. I sat silent some time, then turned to Harris and said:

"My mind is made up."

Something in my tone struck him: and when he glanced at my eye and read what was written there, his face paled perceptibly. He hesitated a moment, then said:

"Speak."

I answered, with perfect calmness:

"I will ascend the Riffelberg."

If I had shot my poor friend he could not have fallen from his chair more suddenly. If I had been his father he could not have pleaded harder to get me to give up my purpose. But I turned a deaf ear to all he said. When he perceived at last that nothing could alter my determination, he ceased to urge, and for a while the deep silence was broken only by his sobs. I sat in marble resolution, with my eyes fixed upon vacancy, for in spirit I was already wrestling with the perils of the mountains, and my friend sat gazing at me in adoring admiration through his tears. At last he threw himself upon me in a loving embrace and exclaimed in broken tones:

"Your Harris will never desert you. We will die together."

I cheered the noble fellow with praises, and soon his fears were forgotten and he was eager for the adventure. He wanted to summon the guides at once and leave at two in the morning, as he supposed the custom was; but I explained that nobody was looking at that hour; and that the start in the dark was not usually made from the village but from the first night's resting-place on the mountain side. I said we would leave the village at 3 or 4 P.M. on the morrow; meantime he could notify the guides, and also let the public know of the attempt which we proposed to make.

I went to bed, but not to sleep. No man can sleep when he is about to undertake one of these Alpine exploits. I tossed feverishly all night long, and was glad enough when I heard the clock strike half past eleven and knew it was time to get up for dinner. I rose, jaded and rusty, and went to the noon meal, where I found myself the center of interest and curiosity; for the news was already abroad. It is not easy to eat calmly when you are a lion; but it is very pleasant,

nevertheless.

As usual, at Zermatt, when a great ascent is about to be undertaken, everybody, native and foreign, laid aside his own projects and took up a good position to observe the start. The expedition consisted of 198 persons, including the mules; or 205, including the cows. As follows:

CHIEFS OF SERVICE	SUBORDINATES
Myself	1 Veterinary Surgeon
Mr. Harris	1 Butler
17 Guides	12 Waiters
4 Surgeons	1 Footman
1 Geologist	1 Barber
1 Botanist	1 Head Cook
3 Chaplains	9 Assistants
2 Draftsman	4 Pastry Cooks
15 Barkeepers	1 Confectionery Artist
1 Latinist	

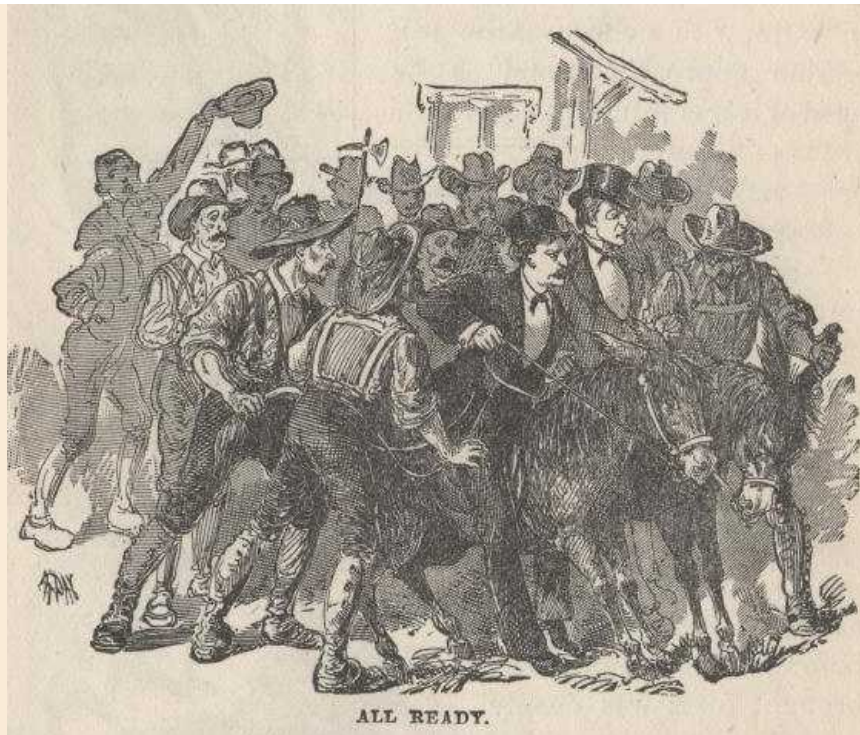
TRANSPORTATION, ETC.

27 Porters	3 Coarse Washers and Ironers
44 Mules	1 Fine ditto
44 Muleteers	7 Cows
	2 Milkers

Total, 154 men, 51 animals. Grand Total, 205.

RATIONS, ETC.		APPARATUS
16	Cases Hams	25 Spring Mattresses
2	Barrels Flour	2 Hair ditto
22	Barrels Whiskey	Bedding for same
1	Barrel Sugar	2 Mosquito-nets
1	Keg Lemons	29 Tents
2,000	Cigars	Scientific Instruments
1	Barrel Pies	97 Ice-axes
1	Ton of Pemmican	5 Cases Dynamite
143	Pair Crutches	7 Cans Nitroglycerin
2	Barrels Arnica	22 40-foot Ladders
1	Bale of Lint	2 Miles of Rope
27	Kegs Paregoric	154 Umbrellas

It was full four o'clock in the afternoon before my cavalcade was entirely ready. At that hour it began to move. In point of numbers and spectacular effect, it was the most imposing expedition that had ever marched from Zermatt.



I commanded the chief guide to arrange the men and animals in single file, twelve feet apart, and lash them all together on a strong rope. He objected that the first two miles was a dead level, with plenty of room, and that the rope was never used except in very dangerous places. But I would not listen to that. My reading had taught me that many serious accidents had happened in the Alps simply from not having the people tied up soon enough; I was not going to add one to the list. The guide then obeyed my order.

When the procession stood at ease, roped together, and ready to move, I never saw a finer sight. It was 3,122 feet long—over half a mile; every man and me was on foot, and had on his green veil and his blue goggles, and his white rag around his hat, and his coil of rope over one shoulder and under the other, and his ice-ax in his belt, and carried his alpenstock in his left hand, his umbrella (closed) in his right, and his crutches slung at his back. The burdens of the pack-mules and the horns of the cows were decked with the Edelweiss and the Alpine rose.

I and my agent were the only persons mounted. We were in the post of danger in the extreme rear, and tied securely to five guides apiece. Our armor-bearers carried our ice-axes, alpenstocks, and other implements for us. We were mounted upon very small donkeys, as a measure of safety; in time of peril we could straighten our legs and stand up, and let the donkey walk from under. Still, I cannot recommend this sort of animal—at least for excursions of mere pleasure—because his ears interrupt the view. I and my agent possessed the regulation mountaineering costumes, but concluded to leave them behind. Out of respect for the great numbers of tourists of both sexes who would be assembled in front of the hotels to see us pass, and also out of respect for the many tourists whom we expected to encounter on our expedition, we decided to make the ascent in evening dress.

At 15 minutes past 4 I gave the command to move, and my subordinates passed it along the line. The great crowd in front of the Monte Rosa hotel parted in twain, with a cheer, as the procession approached; and as the head of it was filing by I gave the order,—“Unlimber—make ready—HOIST!”

—and with one impulse up went my half mile of umbrellas. It was a beautiful sight, and a total surprise to the spectators. Nothing like that had ever been seen in the Alps before. The applause it brought forth was deeply gratifying to me, and I rode by with my plug hat in my hand to testify my appreciation of it. It was the only testimony I could offer, for I was too full to speak.



We watered the caravan at the cold stream which rushes down a trough near the end of the village, and soon afterward left the haunts of civilization behind us. About half past five o'clock we arrived at a bridge which spans the Visp, and after throwing over a detachment to see if it was safe, the caravan crossed without accident. The way now led, by a gentle ascent, carpeted with fresh green grass, to the church at Winkelmaten. Without stopping to examine this edifice, I executed a flank movement to the right and crossed the bridge over the Findelenbach, after first testing its strength. Here I deployed to the right again, and presently entered an inviting stretch of meadowland which was unoccupied save by a couple of deserted huts toward the furthest extremity. These meadows offered an excellent camping-place. We pitched our tents, supped, established a proper grade, recorded the events of the day, and then went to bed.

We rose at two in the morning and dressed by candle-light. It was a dismal and chilly business. A few stars were shining, but the general heavens were overcast, and the great shaft of the Matterhorn was draped in a cable pall of clouds. The chief guide advised a delay; he said he feared it was going to rain. We waited until nine o'clock, and then got away in tolerably clear weather.



Our course led up some terrific steeps, densely wooded with larches and cedars, and traversed by paths which the rains had guttered and which were obstructed by loose stones. To add to the danger and inconvenience, we were constantly meeting returning tourists on foot and horseback, and as constantly being crowded and battered by ascending tourists who were in a hurry and wanted to get by.

Our troubles thickened. About the middle of the afternoon the seventeen guides called a halt and held a consultation. After consulting an hour they said their first suspicion remained intact—that is to say, they believed they were lost. I asked if they did not KNOW it? No, they said, they COULDN'T absolutely know whether they were lost or not, because none of them had ever been in that part of the country before. They had a strong instinct that they were lost, but they had no proofs—except that they did not know where they were. They had met no tourists for some time, and they considered that a suspicious sign.

Plainly we were in an ugly fix. The guides were naturally unwilling to go alone and seek a way out of the difficulty; so we all went together. For better security we moved slow and cautiously, for the forest was very dense. We did not move up the mountain, but around it, hoping to strike across the old trail. Toward nightfall, when we were about tired out, we came up against a rock as big as a cottage. This barrier took all the remaining spirit out of the men, and a panic of fear and despair ensued. They moaned and wept, and said they should never see their homes and their dear ones again. Then they began to upbraid me for bringing them upon this fatal expedition. Some even muttered threats against me.

Clearly it was no time to show weakness. So I made a speech in which I said that other Alpclimbers had been in as perilous a position as this, and yet by courage and perseverance had escaped. I promised to stand by them, I promised to rescue them. I closed by saying we had plenty of provisions to maintain us for quite a siege—and did they suppose Zermatt would allow half a mile of men and mules to mysteriously disappear during any considerable time, right above their noses, and make no inquiries? No, Zermatt would send out searching-expeditions and we should be saved.

This speech had a great effect. The men pitched the tents with some little show of cheerfulness, and we were snugly under cover when the night shut down. I now reaped the reward of my wisdom in providing one article which is not mentioned in any book of Alpine adventure but this. I refer to the paregoric. But for that beneficent drug, would have not one of those men slept a moment during that fearful night. But for that gentle persuader they must have tossed, unsoothed, the night through; for the whiskey was for me. Yes, they would have risen in the morning unfitted for their heavy task. As it was, everybody slept but my agent and me—only we and the barkeepers. I would not permit myself to sleep at such a time. I considered myself responsible for all those lives. I meant to be on hand and ready, in case of avalanches up there, but I did not know it then.

We watched the weather all through that awful night, and kept an eye on the barometer, to be prepared for the least change. There was not the slightest change recorded by the instrument, during the whole time. Words cannot describe the comfort that that friendly, hopeful, steadfast thing was to me in that season of trouble. It was a defective barometer, and had no hand but the

stationary brass pointer, but I did not know that until afterward. If I should be in such a situation again, I should not wish for any barometer but that one.



All hands rose at two in the morning and took breakfast, and as soon as it was light we roped ourselves together and went at that rock. For some time we tried the hook-rope and other means of scaling it, but without success—that is, without perfect success. The hook caught once, and Harris started up it hand over hand, but the hold broke and if there had not happened to be a chaplain sitting underneath at the time, Harris would certainly have been crippled. As it was, it was the chaplain. He took to his crutches, and I ordered the hook-rope to be laid aside. It was too dangerous an implement where so many people are standing around.



We were puzzled for a while; then somebody thought of the ladders. One of these was leaned against the rock, and the men went up it tied together in couples. Another ladder was sent up for use in descending. At the end of half an hour everybody was over, and that rock was conquered. We gave our first grand shout of triumph. But the joy was short-lived, for somebody asked how we were going to get the animals over.

This was a serious difficulty; in fact, it was an impossibility. The courage of the men began to waver immediately; once more we were threatened with a panic. But when the danger was most imminent, we were saved in a mysterious way. A mule which had attracted attention from the beginning by its disposition to experiment, tried to eat a five-pound can of nitroglycerin. This happened right alongside the rock. The explosion threw us all to the ground, and covered us with dirt and debris; it frightened us extremely, too, for the crash it made was deafening, and the violence of the shock made the ground tremble. However, we were grateful, for the rock was gone. Its place was occupied by a new cellar, about thirty feet across, by fifteen feet deep. The explosion was heard as far as Zermatt; and an hour and a half afterward, many citizens of that town were knocked down and quite seriously injured by descending portions of mule meat, frozen solid. This shows, better than any estimate in figures, how high the experimenter went.



We had nothing to do, now, but bridge the cellar and proceed on our way. With a cheer the men went at their work. I attended to the engineering, myself. I appointed a strong detail to cut down trees with ice-axes and trim them for piers to support the bridge. This was a slow business, for

ice-axes are not good to cut wood with. I caused my piers to be firmly set up in ranks in the cellar, and upon them I laid six of my forty-foot ladders, side by side, and laid six more on top of them. Upon this bridge I caused a bed of boughs to be spread, and on top of the boughs a bed of earth six inches deep. I stretched ropes upon either side to serve as railings, and then my bridge was complete. A train of elephants could have crossed it in safety and comfort. By nightfall the caravan was on the other side and the ladders were taken up.

Next morning we went on in good spirits for a while, though our way was slow and difficult, by reason of the steep and rocky nature of the ground and the thickness of the forest; but at last a dull despondency crept into the men's faces and it was apparent that not only they, but even the guides, were now convinced that we were lost. The fact that we still met no tourists was a circumstance that was but too significant. Another thing seemed to suggest that we were not only lost, but very badly lost; for there must surely be searching-parties on the road before this time, yet we had seen no sign of them.

Demoralization was spreading; something must be done, and done quickly, too. Fortunately, I am not unfertile in expedients. I contrived one now which commended itself to all, for it promised well. I took three-quarters of a mile of rope and fastened one end of it around the waist of a guide, and told him to go find the road, while the caravan waited. I instructed him to guide himself back by the rope, in case of failure; in case of success, he was to give the rope a series of violent jerks, whereupon the Expedition would go to him at once. He departed, and in two minutes had disappeared among the trees. I payed out the rope myself, while everybody watched the crawling thing with eager eyes. The rope crept away quite slowly, at times, at other times with some briskness. Twice or thrice we seemed to get the signal, and a shout was just ready to break from the men's lips when they perceived it was a false alarm. But at last, when over half a mile of rope had slidden away, it stopped gliding and stood absolutely still—one minute—two minutes—three—while we held our breath and watched.

Was the guide resting? Was he scanning the country from some high point? Was he inquiring of a chance mountaineer? Stop,—had he fainted from excess of fatigue and anxiety?

This thought gave us a shock. I was in the very first act of detailing an Expedition to succor him, when the cord was assailed with a series of such frantic jerks that I could hardly keep hold of it. The huzza that went up, then, was good to hear. "Saved! saved!" was the word that rang out, all down the long rank of the caravan.



We rose up and started at once. We found the route to be good enough for a while, but it began to grow difficult, by and by, and this feature steadily increased. When we judged we had gone half a mile, we momentarily expected to see the guide; but no, he was not visible anywhere; neither was he waiting, for the rope was still moving, consequently he was doing the same. This argued that he had not found the road, yet, but was marching to it with some peasant. There was nothing for us to do but plod along—and this we did. At the end of three hours we were still plodding. This was not only mysterious, but exasperating. And very fatiguing, too; for we had tried hard, along at first, to catch up with the guide, but had only fagged ourselves, in vain; for although he was traveling slowly he was yet able to go faster than the hampered caravan over such ground.

At three in the afternoon we were nearly dead with exhaustion—and still the rope was slowly

gliding out. The murmurs against the guide had been growing steadily, and at last they were become loud and savage. A mutiny ensued. The men refused to proceed. They declared that we had been traveling over and over the same ground all day, in a kind of circle. They demanded that our end of the rope be made fast to a tree, so as to halt the guide until we could overtake him and kill him. This was not an unreasonable requirement, so I gave the order.

As soon as the rope was tied, the Expedition moved forward with that alacrity which the thirst for vengeance usually inspires. But after a tiresome march of almost half a mile, we came to a hill covered thick with a crumbly rubbish of stones, and so steep that no man of us all was now in a condition to climb it. Every attempt failed, and ended in crippling somebody. Within twenty minutes I had five men on crutches.



Whenever a climber tried to assist himself by the rope, it yielded and let him tumble backward. The frequency of this result suggested an idea to me. I ordered the caravan to 'bout face and form in marching order; I then made the tow-rope fast to the rear mule, and gave the command:

"Mark time—by the right flank—forward—march!"



The procession began to move, to the impressive strains of a battle-chant, and I said to myself, "Now, if the rope don't break I judge THIS will fetch that guide into the camp." I watched the rope gliding down the hill, and presently when I was all fixed for triumph I was confronted by a bitter disappointment; there was no guide tied to the rope, it was only a very indignant old black ram. The fury of the baffled Expedition exceeded all bounds. They even wanted to wreak their unreasoning vengeance on this innocent dumb brute. But I stood between them and their prey, menaced by a bristling wall of ice-axes and alpenstocks, and proclaimed that there was but one road to this murder, and it was directly over my corpse. Even as I spoke I saw that my doom was sealed, except a miracle supervened to divert these madmen from their fell purpose. I see the sickening wall of weapons now; I see that advancing host as I saw it then, I see the hate in those cruel eyes; I remember how I drooped my head upon my breast, I feel again the sudden earthquake shock in my rear, administered by the very ram I was sacrificing myself to save; I hear once more the typhoon of laughter that burst from the assaulting column as I clove it from van to rear like a Sepoy shot from a Rodman gun.



I was saved. Yes, I was saved, and by the merciful instinct of ingratitude which nature had planted in the breast of that treacherous beast. The grace which eloquence had failed to work in those men's hearts, had been wrought by a laugh. The ram was set free and my life was spared.

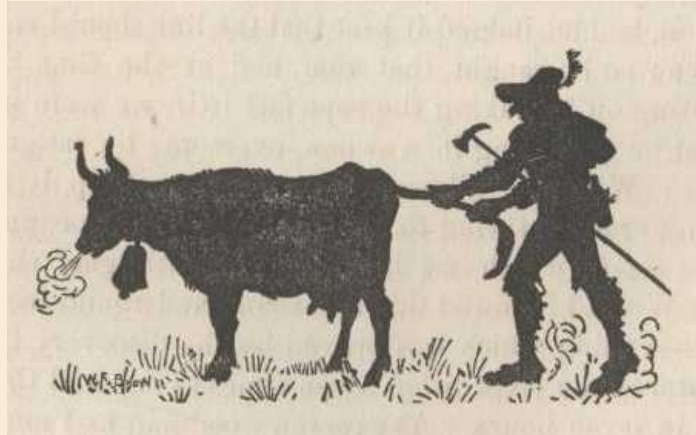
We lived to find out that that guide had deserted us as soon as he

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We lived to find out that that guide had deserted us as soon as he had placed a half-mile between himself and us. To avert suspicion, he had judged it best that the line should continue to move; so he caught that ram, and at the time that he was sitting on it making the rope fast to it, we were imagining that he was lying in a swoon, overcome by fatigue and distress. When he allowed the ram to get up it fell to plunging around, trying to rid itself of the rope, and this was the signal which we had risen up with glad shouts to obey. We had followed this ram round and round in a circle all day—a thing which was proven by the discovery that we had watered the Expedition seven times at one and same spring in seven hours. As expert a woodman as I am, I had somehow failed to notice this until my attention was called to it by a hog. This hog was always wallowing there, and as he was the only hog we saw, his frequent repetition, together with his unvarying similarity to himself, finally caused me to reflect that he must be the same hog, and this led me to the deduction that this must be the same spring, also—which indeed it was.

I made a note of this curious thing, as showing in a striking manner the relative difference between glacial action and the action of the hog. It is now a well-established fact that glaciers move; I consider that my observations go to show, with equal conclusiveness, that a hog in a spring does not move. I shall be glad to receive the opinions of other observers upon this point.

To return, for an explanatory moment, to that guide, and then I shall be done with him. After leaving the ram tied to the rope, he had wandered at large a while, and then happened to run across a cow. Judging that a cow would naturally know more than a guide, he took her by the tail, and the result justified his judgment. She nibbled her leisurely way downhill till it was near milking-time, then she struck for home and towed him into Zermatt.



CHAPTER XXXVIII

[I Conquer the Gorner Grat]

We went into camp on that wild spot to which that ram had brought us. The men were greatly fatigued. Their conviction that we were lost was forgotten in the cheer of a good supper, and before the reaction had a chance to set in, I loaded them up with paregoric and put them to bed.

Next morning I was considering in my mind our desperate situation and trying to think of a remedy, when Harris came to me with a Baedeker map which showed conclusively that the mountain we were on was still in Switzerland—yes, every part of it was in Switzerland. So we were not lost, after all. This was an immense relief; it lifted the weight of two such mountains from my breast. I immediately had the news disseminated and the map was exhibited. The effect was wonderful. As soon as the men saw with their own eyes that they knew where they were, and that it was only the summit that was lost and not themselves, they cheered up instantly and said with one accord, let the summit take care of itself.

Our distresses being at an end, I now determined to rest the men in camp and give the scientific department of the Expedition a chance. First, I made a barometric observation, to get our altitude, but I could not perceive that there was any result. I knew, by my scientific reading, that either thermometers or barometers ought to be boiled, to make them accurate; I did not know which it was, so I boiled them both. There was still no result; so I examined these instruments and discovered that they possessed radical blemishes: the barometer had no hand but the brass pointer and the ball of the thermometer was stuffed with tin-foil. I might have boiled those things to rags, and never found out anything.

I hunted up another barometer; it was new and perfect. I boiled it half an hour in a pot of bean soup which the cooks were making. The result was unexpected: the instrument was not affecting at all, but there was such a strong barometer taste to the soup that the head cook, who was a most conscientious person, changed its name in the bill of fare. The dish was so greatly liked by all, that I ordered the cook to have barometer soup every day.



It was believed that the barometer might eventually be injured, but I did not care for that. I had demonstrated to my satisfaction that it could not tell how high a mountain was, therefore I had no real use for it. Changes in the weather I could take care of without it; I did not wish to know when the weather was going to be good, what I wanted to know was when it was going to be bad, and this I could find out from Harris's corns. Harris had had his corns tested and regulated at the government observatory in Heidelberg, and one could depend upon them with confidence. So I transferred the new barometer to the cooking department, to be used for the official mess. It was found that even a pretty fair article of soup could be made from the defective barometer; so I allowed that one to be transferred to the subordinate mess.

I next boiled the thermometer, and got a most excellent result; the mercury went up to about 200 degrees Fahrenheit. In the opinion of the other scientists of the Expedition, this seemed to indicate that we had attained the extraordinary altitude of two hundred thousand feet above sea-level. Science places the line of eternal snow at about ten thousand feet above sea-level. There was no snow where we were, consequently it was proven that the eternal snow-line ceases somewhere above the ten-thousand-foot level and does not begin any more. This was an interesting fact, and one which had not been observed by any observer before. It was as valuable as interesting, too, since it would open up the deserted summits of the highest Alps to population and agriculture. It was a proud thing to be where we were, yet it caused us a pang to reflect that but for that ram we might just as well have been two hundred thousand feet higher.

The success of my last experiment induced me to try an experiment with my photographic apparatus. I got it out, and boiled one of my cameras, but the thing was a failure; it made the wood swell up and burst, and I could not see that the lenses were any better than they were before.

I now concluded to boil a guide. It might improve him, it could not impair his usefulness. But I was not allowed to proceed. Guides have no feeling for science, and this one would not consent to be made uncomfortable in its interest.

In the midst of my scientific work, one of those needless accidents happened which are always occurring among the ignorant and thoughtless. A porter shot at a chamois and missed it and crippled the Latinist. This was not a serious matter to me, for a Latinist's duties are as well performed on crutches as otherwise—but the fact remained that if the Latinist had not happened to be in the way a mule would have got that load. That would have been quite another matter, for when it comes down to a question of value there is a palpable difference between a Latinist and a mule. I could not depend on having a Latinist in the right place every time; so, to make things safe, I ordered that in the future the chamois must not be hunted within limits of the camp with any other weapon than the forefinger.

My nerves had hardly grown quiet after this affair when they got another shake-up—one which utterly unmanned me for a moment: a rumor swept suddenly through the camp that one of the barkeepers had fallen over a precipice!

However, it turned out that it was only a chaplain. I had laid in an extra force of chaplains, purposely to be prepared for emergencies like this, but by some unaccountable oversight had come away rather short-handed in the matter of barkeepers.

On the following morning we moved on, well refreshed and in good spirits. I remember this day with peculiar pleasure, because it saw our road restored to us. Yes, we found our road again, and in quite an extraordinary way. We had plodded along some two hours and a half, when we came

up against a solid mass of rock about twenty feet high. I did not need to be instructed by a mule this time. I was already beginning to know more than any mule in the Expedition. I at once put in a blast of dynamite, and lifted that rock out of the way. But to my surprise and mortification, I found that there had been a chalet on top of it.

I picked up such members of the family as fell in my vicinity, and subordinates of my corps collected the rest. None of these poor people were injured, happily, but they were much annoyed. I explained to the head chaletier just how the thing happened, and that I was only searching for the road, and would certainly have given him timely notice if I had known he was up there. I said I had meant no harm, and hoped I had not lowered myself in his estimation by raising him a few rods in the air. I said many other judicious things, and finally when I offered to rebuild his chalet, and pay for the breakages, and throw in the cellar, he was mollified and satisfied. He hadn't any cellar at all, before; he would not have as good a view, now, as formerly, but what he had lost in view he had gained in cellar, by exact measurement. He said there wasn't another hole like that in the mountains—and he would have been right if the late mule had not tried to eat up the nitroglycerin.

I put a hundred and sixteen men at work, and they rebuilt the chalet from its own debris in fifteen minutes. It was a good deal more picturesque than it was before, too. The man said we were now on the Feil-Stutz, above the Schwegmatt—information which I was glad to get, since it gave us our position to a degree of particularity which we had not been accustomed to for a day or so. We also learned that we were standing at the foot of the Riffelberg proper, and that the initial chapter of our work was completed.



We had a fine view, from here, of the energetic Visp, as it makes its first plunge into the world from under a huge arch of solid ice, worn through the foot-wall of the great Gorner Glacier; and we could also see the Furggenbach, which is the outlet of the Furggen Glacier.

The mule-road to the summit of the Riffelberg passed right in front of the chalet, a circumstance which we almost immediately noticed, because a procession of tourists was filing along it pretty much all the time.

"Pretty much" may not be elegant English, but it is high time it was. There is no elegant word or phrase which means just what it means.—M.T.

The chalet's business consisted in furnishing refreshments to tourists. My blast had interrupted this trade for a few minutes, by breaking all the bottles on the place; but I gave the man a lot of whiskey to sell for Alpine champagne, and a lot of vinegar which would answer for Rhine wine, consequently trade was soon as brisk as ever.

Leaving the Expedition outside to rest, I quartered myself in the chalet, with Harris, proposing to correct my journals and scientific observations before continuing the ascent. I had hardly begun my work when a tall, slender, vigorous American youth of about twenty-three, who was on his way down the mountain, entered and came toward me with that breezy self-complacency which is the adolescent's idea of the well-bred ease of the man of the world. His hair was short and parted accurately in the middle, and he had all the look of an American person who would be likely to begin his signature with an initial, and spell his middle name out. He introduced himself, smiling a smirky smile borrowed from the courtiers of the stage, extended a fair-skinned talon, and while he gripped my hand in it he bent his body forward three times at the hips, as the stage courtier does, and said in the airiest and most condescending and patronizing way—I quite remember his exact language:

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, 'm sure; very glad indeed, assure you. I've read all your little efforts and greatly admired them, and when I heard you were here, I ..."

I indicated a chair, and he sat down. This grandee was the grandson of an American of considerable note in his day, and not wholly forgotten yet—a man who came so near being a great man that he was quite generally accounted one while he lived.



I slowly paced the floor, pondering scientific problems, and heard this conversation:

GRANDSON. First visit to Europe?

HARRIS. Mine? Yes.

G.S. (With a soft reminiscent sigh suggestive of bygone joys that may be tasted in their freshness but once.) Ah, I know what it is to you. A first visit!—ah, the romance of it! I wish I could feel it again.

H. Yes, I find it exceeds all my dreams. It is enchantment. I go...

G.S. (With a dainty gesture of the hand signifying "Spare me your callow enthusiasms, good friend.") Yes, I know, I know; you go to cathedrals, and exclaim; and you drag through league-long picture-galleries and exclaim; and you stand here, and there, and yonder, upon historic ground, and continue to exclaim; and you are permeated with your first crude conceptions of Art, and are proud and happy. Ah, yes, proud and happy—that expresses it. Yes-yes, enjoy it—it is right—it is an innocent revel.

H. And you? Don't you do these things now?

G.S. I! Oh, that is VERY good! My dear sir, when you are as old a traveler as I am, you will not ask such a question as that. I visit the regulation gallery, moon around the regulation cathedral, do the worn round of the regulation sights, YET?—Excuse me!

H. Well, what DO you do, then?

G.S. Do? I flit—and flit—for I am ever on the wing—but I avoid the herd. Today I am in Paris, tomorrow in Berlin, anon in Rome; but you would look for me in vain in the galleries of the Louvre or the common resorts of the gazers in those other capitals. If you would find me, you must look in the unvisited nooks and corners where others never think of going. One day you will find me making myself at home in some obscure peasant's cabin, another day you will find me in some forgotten castle worshiping some little gem or art which the careless eye has overlooked and which the unexperienced would despise; again you will find me as guest in the inner sanctuaries of palaces while the herd is content to get a hurried glimpse of the unused chambers by feeing a servant.

H. You are a GUEST in such places?

G.S. And a welcoming one.

H. It is surprising. How does it come?

G.S. My grandfather's name is a passport to all the courts in Europe. I have only to utter that name and every door is open to me. I flit from court to court at my own free will and pleasure, and am always welcome. I am as much at home in the palaces of Europe as you are among your relatives. I know every titled person in Europe, I think. I have my pockets full of invitations all the time. I am under promise to go to Italy, where I am to be the guest of a succession of the noblest houses in the land. In Berlin my life is a continued round of gaiety in the imperial palace. It is the same, wherever I go.

H. It must be very pleasant. But it must make Boston seem a little slow when you are at home.

G.S. Yes, of course it does. But I don't go home much. There's no life there—little to feed a man's higher nature. Boston's very narrow, you know. She doesn't know it, and you couldn't convince her of it—so I say nothing when I'm there: where's the use? Yes, Boston is very narrow, but she has such a good opinion of herself that she can't see it. A man who has traveled as much as I have, and seen as much of the world, sees it plain enough, but he can't cure it, you know, so the best is to leave it and seek a sphere which is more in harmony with his tastes and culture. I run across there, once a year, perhaps, when I have nothing important on hand, but I'm very soon back again. I spend my time in Europe.

H. I see. You map out your plans and ...

G.S. No, excuse me. I don't map out any plans. I simply follow the inclination of the day. I am limited by no ties, no requirements, I am not bound in any way. I am too old a traveler to hamper myself with deliberate purposes. I am simply a traveler—an inveterate traveler—a man of the world, in a word—I can call myself by no other name. I do not say, "I am going here, or I am going there"—I say nothing at all, I only act. For instance, next week you may find me the guest of a grandee of Spain, or you may find me off for Venice, or flitting toward Dresden. I shall probably go to Egypt presently; friends will say to friends, "He is at the Nile cataracts"—and at that very moment they will be surprised to learn that I'm away off yonder in India somewhere. I am a constant surprise to people. They are always saying, "Yes, he was in Jerusalem when we heard of him last, but goodness knows where he is now."

Presently the Grandson rose to leave—discovered he had an appointment with some Emperor, perhaps. He did his graces over again: gripped me with one talon, at arm's-length, pressed his hat against his stomach with the other, bent his body in the middle three times, murmuring:

"Pleasure, 'm sure; great pleasure, 'm sure. Wish you much success."

Then he removed his gracious presence. It is a great and solemn thing to have a grandfather.

I have not purposed to misrepresent this boy in any way, for what little indignation he excited in me soon passed and left nothing behind it but compassion. One cannot keep up a grudge against a vacuum. I have tried to repeat this lad's very words; if I have failed anywhere I have at least not failed to reproduce the marrow and meaning of what he said. He and the innocent chatterbox whom I met on the Swiss lake are the most unique and interesting specimens of Young America I came across during my foreign tramping. I have made honest portraits of them, not caricatures.



The Grandson of twenty-three referred to himself five or six times as an "old traveler," and as many as three times (with a serene complacency which was maddening) as a "man of the world." There was something very delicious about his leaving Boston to her "narrowness," unproved and uninstructed.

I formed the caravan in marching order, presently, and after riding down the line to see that it was properly roped together, gave the command to proceed. In a little while the road carried us to open, grassy land. We were above the troublesome forest, now, and had an uninterrupted view, straight before us, of our summit—the summit of the Riffelberg.

We followed the mule-road, a zigzag course, now to the right, now to the left, but always up, and always crowded and incommoded by going and coming files of reckless tourists who were never, in a single instance, tied together. I was obliged to exert the utmost care and caution, for in many places the road was not two yards wide, and often the lower side of it sloped away in slanting precipices eight and even nine feet deep. I had to encourage the men constantly, to keep them from giving way to their unmanly fears.

We might have made the summit before night, but for a delay caused by the loss of an umbrella. I was allowing the umbrella to remain lost, but the men murmured, and with reason, for in this exposed region we stood in peculiar need of protection against avalanches; so I went into camp and detached a strong party to go after the missing article.

The difficulties of the next morning were severe, but our courage was high, for our goal was near. At noon we conquered the last impediment—we stood at last upon the summit, and without the loss of a single man except the mule that ate the glycerin. Our great achievement was achieved—the possibility of the impossible was demonstrated, and Harris and I walked proudly into the great dining-room of the Riffelberg Hotel and stood our alpenstocks up in the corner.

Yes, I had made the grand ascent; but it was a mistake to do it in evening dress. The plug hats were battered, the swallow-tails were fluttering rags, mud added no grace, the general effect was unpleasant and even disreputable.



SUMMIT OF THE GORNER GRAT.

There were about seventy-five tourists at the hotel—mainly ladies and little children—and they gave us an admiring welcome which paid us for all our privations and sufferings. The ascent had been made, and the names and dates now stand recorded on a stone monument there to prove it to all future tourists.

I boiled a thermometer and took an altitude, with a most curious result: THE SUMMIT WAS NOT AS HIGH AS THE POINT ON THE MOUNTAIN SIDE WHERE I HAD TAKEN THE FIRST ALTITUDE. Suspecting that I had made an important discovery, I prepared to verify it. There happened to be a still higher summit (called the Gornier Grat), above the hotel, and notwithstanding the fact that it overlooks a glacier from a dizzy height, and that the ascent is difficult and dangerous, I resolved to venture up there and boil a thermometer. So I sent a strong party, with some borrowed hoes, in charge of two chiefs of service, to dig a stairway in the soil all the way up, and this I ascended, roped to the guides. This breezy height was the summit proper—so I accomplished even more than I had originally purposed to do. This foolhardy exploit is recorded on another stone monument.



CHIEFS OF THE ADVANCE GUARD.

I boiled my thermometer, and sure enough, this spot, which purported to be two thousand feet higher than the locality of the hotel, turned out to be nine thousand feet LOWER. Thus the fact was clearly demonstrated that, ABOVE A CERTAIN POINT, THE HIGHER A POINT SEEMS TO BE, THE LOWER IT ACTUALLY IS. Our ascent itself was a great achievement, but this contribution to science was an inconceivably greater matter.

Cavilers object that water boils at a lower and lower temperature the higher and higher you go, and hence the apparent anomaly. I answer that I do not base my theory upon what the boiling water does, but upon what a boiled thermometer says. You can't go behind the thermometer.

I had a magnificent view of Monte Rosa, and apparently all the rest of the Alpine world, from that high place. All the circling horizon was piled high with a mighty tumult of snowy crests. One might have imagined he saw before him the tented camps of a beleaguering host of Brobdingnagians.



NOTE.—I had the very unusual luck to catch one little momentary glimpse of the Matterhorn wholly unencumbered by clouds. I leveled my photographic apparatus at it without the loss of an instant, and should have got an elegant picture if my donkey had not interfered. It was my purpose to draw this photograph all by myself for my book, but was obliged to put the mountain part of it into the hands of the professional artist because I found I could not do landscape well.

But lonely, conspicuous, and superb, rose that wonderful upright wedge, the Matterhorn. Its precipitous sides were powdered over with snow, and the upper half hidden in thick clouds which now and then dissolved to cobweb films and gave brief glimpses of the imposing tower as through a veil. A little later the Matterhorn took to himself the semblance of a volcano; he was stripped naked to his apex—around this circled vast wreaths of white cloud which strung slowly out and streamed away slantwise toward the sun, a twenty-mile stretch of rolling and tumbling vapor, and looking just as if it were pouring out of a crater. Later again, one of the mountain's sides was clean and clear, and another side densely clothed from base to summit in thick smokelike cloud which feathered off and flew around the shaft's sharp edge like the smoke around the corners of a burning building. The Matterhorn is always experimenting, and always gets up fine effects, too. In the sunset, when all the lower world is palled in gloom, it points toward heaven out of the pervading blackness like a finger of fire. In the sunrise—well, they say it is very fine in the sunrise.

Authorities agree that there is no such tremendous "layout" of snowy Alpine magnitude, grandeur, and sublimity to be seen from any other accessible point as the tourist may see from the summit of the Riffelberg. Therefore, let the tourist rope himself up and go there; for I have shown that with nerve, caution, and judgment, the thing can be done.

I wish to add one remark, here—in parentheses, so to speak—suggested by the word "snowy," which I have just used. We have all seen hills and mountains and levels with snow on them, and so we think we know all the aspects and effects produced by snow. But indeed we do not until we have seen the Alps. Possibly mass and distance add something—at any rate, something IS added. Among other noticeable things, there is a dazzling, intense whiteness about the distant Alpine snow, when the sun is on it, which one recognizes as peculiar, and not familiar to the eye. The snow which one is accustomed to has a tint to it—painters usually give it a bluish cast—but there is no perceptible tint to the distant Alpine snow when it is trying to look its whitest. As to the unimaginable splendor of it when the sun is blazing down on it—well, it simply IS unimaginable.

CHAPTER XXXIX

[We Travel by Glacier]

A guide-book is a queer thing. The reader has just seen what a man who undertakes the great ascent from Zermatt to the Riffelberg Hotel must experience. Yet Baedeker makes these strange statements concerning this matter:

1. Distance—3 hours.
2. The road cannot be mistaken.
3. Guide unnecessary.
4. Distance from Riffelberg Hotel to the Gorner Grat, one hour and a half.
5. Ascent simple and easy. Guide unnecessary.
6. Elevation of Zermatt above sea-level, 5,315 feet.
7. Elevation of Riffelberg Hotel above sea-level, 8,429 feet.
8. Elevation of the Gorner Grat above sea-level, 10,289 feet.

I have pretty effectually throttled these errors by sending him the following demonstrated facts:

1. Distance from Zermatt to Riffelberg Hotel, 7 days.
2. The road CAN be mistaken. If I am the first that did it, I want the credit of it, too.
3. Guides ARE necessary, for none but a native can read those finger-boards.
4. The estimate of the elevation of the several localities above sea-level is pretty correct—for Baedeker. He only misses it about a hundred and eighty or ninety thousand feet.

I found my arnica invaluable. My men were suffering excruciatingly, from the friction of sitting down so much. During two or three days, not one of them was able to do more than lie down or walk about; yet so effective was the arnica, that on the fourth all were able to sit up. I consider that, more than to anything else, I owe the success of our great undertaking to arnica and paregoric.

My men are being restored to health and strength, my main perplexity, now, was how to get them down the mountain again. I was not willing to expose the brave fellows to the perils, fatigues, and hardships of that fearful route again if it could be helped. First I thought of balloons; but, of course, I had to give that idea up, for balloons were not procurable. I thought of several other expedients, but upon consideration discarded them, for cause. But at last I hit it. I was aware that the movement of glaciers is an established fact, for I had read it in Baedeker; so I resolved to take passage for Zermatt on the great Gorner Glacier.

Very good. The next thing was, how to get down the glacier comfortably—for the mule-road to it was long, and winding, and wearisome. I set my mind at work, and soon thought out a plan. One looks straight down upon the vast frozen river called the Gorner Glacier, from the Gorner Grat, a sheer precipice twelve hundred feet high. We had one hundred and fifty-four umbrellas—and what is an umbrella but a parachute?

I mentioned this noble idea to Harris, with enthusiasm, and was about to order the Expedition to form on the Gorner Grat, with their umbrellas, and prepare for flight by platoons, each platoon in command of a guide, when Harris stopped me and urged me not to be too hasty. He asked me if this method of descending the Alps had ever been tried before. I said no, I had not heard of an instance. Then, in his opinion, it was a matter of considerable gravity; in his opinion it would not be well to send the whole command over the cliff at once; a better way would be to send down a single individual, first, and see how he fared.

I saw the wisdom in this idea instantly. I said as much, and thanked my agent cordially, and told him to take his umbrella and try the thing right away, and wave his hat when he got down, if he struck in a soft place, and then I would ship the rest right along.

Harris was greatly touched with this mark of confidence, and said so, in a voice that had a perceptible tremble in it; but at the same time he said he did not feel himself worthy of so conspicuous a favor; that it might cause jealousy in the command, for there were plenty who would not hesitate to say he had used underhanded means to get the appointment, whereas his conscience would bear him witness that he had not sought it at all, nor even, in his secret heart, desired it.

I said these words did him extreme credit, but that he must not throw away the imperishable distinction of being the first man to descend an Alp per parachute, simply to save the feelings of some envious underlings. No, I said, he MUST accept the appointment—it was no longer an invitation, it was a command.

He thanked me with effusion, and said that putting the thing in this form removed every

objection. He retired, and soon returned with his umbrella, his eye flaming with gratitude and his cheeks pallid with joy. Just then the head guide passed along. Harris's expression changed to one of infinite tenderness, and he said:

"That man did me a cruel injury four days ago, and I said in my heart he should live to perceive and confess that the only noble revenge a man can take upon his enemy is to return good for evil. I resign in his favor. Appoint him."

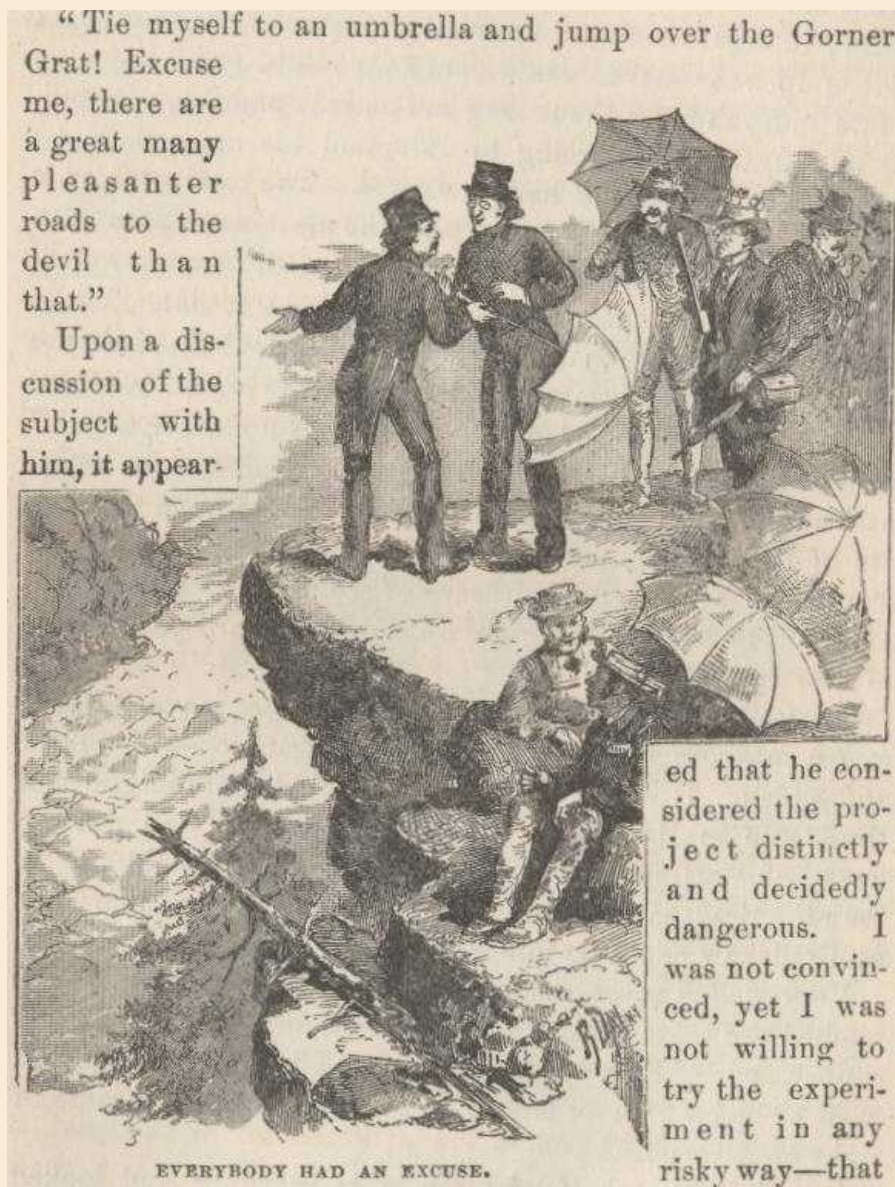
I threw my arms around the generous fellow and said:

"Harris, you are the noblest soul that lives. You shall not regret this sublime act, neither shall the world fail to know of it. You shall have opportunity far transcending this one, too, if I live—remember that."

I called the head guide to me and appointed him on the spot. But the thing aroused no enthusiasm in him. He did not take to the idea at all.

He said:

"Tie myself to an umbrella and jump over the Gorner Grat! Excuse me, there are a great many pleasanter roads to the devil than that."



Upon a discussion of the subject with him, it appeared that he considered the project distinctly and decidedly dangerous. I was not convinced, yet I was not willing to try the experiment in any risky way—that is, in a way that might cripple the strength and efficiency of the Expedition. I was about at my wits' end when it occurred to me to try it on the Latinist.

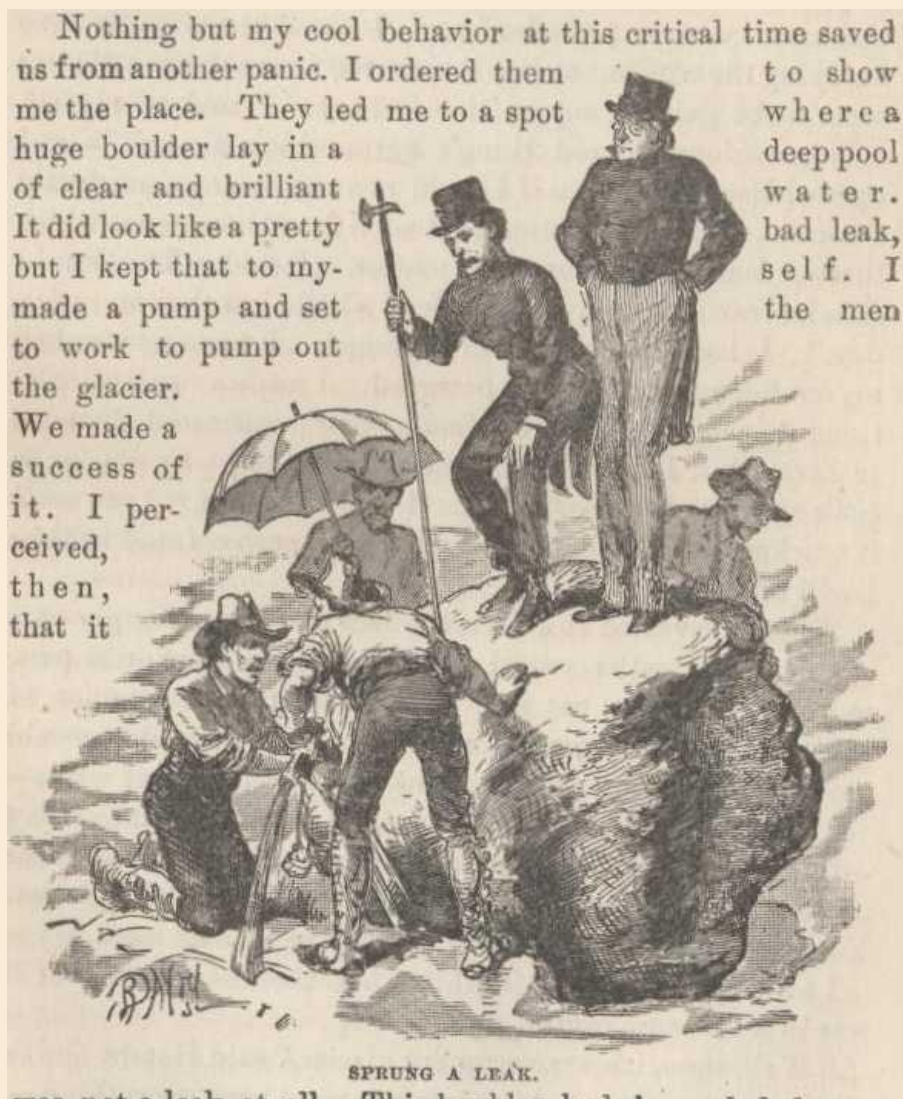
He was called in. But he declined, on the plea of inexperience, diffidence in public, lack of curiosity, and I didn't know what all. Another man declined on account of a cold in the head; thought he ought to avoid exposure. Another could not jump well—never COULD jump well—did not believe he could jump so far without long and patient practice. Another was afraid it was going to rain, and his umbrella had a hole in it. Everybody had an excuse. The result was what the reader has by this time guessed: the most magnificent idea that was ever conceived had to be abandoned, from sheer lack of a person with enterprise enough to carry it out. Yes, I actually had to give that thing up—while doubtless I should live to see somebody use it and take all the credit from me.

Well, I had to go overland—there was no other way. I marched the Expedition down the steep and tedious mule-path and took up as good a position as I could upon the middle of the glacier—because Baedeker said the middle part travels the fastest. As a measure of economy, however, I put some of the heavier baggage on the shoreward parts, to go as slow freight.

I waited and waited, but the glacier did not move. Night was coming on, the darkness began to gather—still we did not budge. It occurred to me then, that there might be a time-table in Baedeker; it would be well to find out the hours of starting. I called for the book—it could not be found. Bradshaw would certainly contain a time-table; but no Bradshaw could be found.

Very well, I must make the best of the situation. So I pitched the tents, picketed the animals, milked the cows, had supper, paregoricked the men, established the watch, and went to bed—with orders to call me as soon as we came in sight of Zermatt.

I awoke about half past ten next morning, and looked around. We hadn't budged a peg! At first I could not understand it; then it occurred to me that the old thing must be aground. So I cut down some trees and rigged a spar on the starboard and another on the port side, and fooled away upward of three hours trying to spar her off. But it was no use. She was half a mile wide and fifteen or twenty miles long, and there was no telling just whereabouts she WAS aground. The men began to show uneasiness, too, and presently they came flying to me with ashy faces, saying she had sprung a leak.



Nothing but my cool behavior at this critical time saved us from another panic. I ordered them to show me the place. They led me to a spot where a huge boulder lay in a deep pool of clear and brilliant water. It did look like a pretty bad leak, but I kept that to myself. I made a pump and set the men to work to pump out the glacier. We made a success of it. I perceived, then, that it was not a leak at all. This boulder had descended from a precipice and stopped on the ice in the middle of the glacier, and the sun had warmed it up, every day, and consequently it had melted its way deeper and deeper into the ice, until at last it reposed, as we had found it, in a deep pool of the clearest and coldest water.

Presently Baedeker was found again, and I hunted eagerly for the time-table. There was none. The book simply said the glacier was moving all the time. This was satisfactory, so I shut up the book and chose a good position to view the scenery as we passed along. I stood there some time enjoying the trip, but at last it occurred to me that we did not seem to be gaining any on the scenery. I said to myself, "This confounded old thing's aground again, sure,"—and opened Baedeker to see if I could run across any remedy for these annoying interruptions. I soon found a sentence which threw a dazzling light upon the matter. It said, "The Gorner Glacier travels at an average rate of a little less than an inch a day." I have seldom felt so outraged. I have seldom had my confidence so wantonly betrayed. I made a small calculation: One inch a day, say thirty feet a year; estimated distance to Zermatt, three and one-eighteenth miles. Time required to go by glacier, A LITTLE OVER FIVE HUNDRED YEARS! I said to myself, "I can WALK it quicker—and before I will patronize such a fraud as this, I will do it."

When I revealed to Harris the fact that the passenger part of this glacier—the central part—the lightning-express part, so to speak—was not due in Zermatt till the summer of 2378, and that the baggage, coming along the slow edge, would not arrive until some generations later, he burst out with:

"That is European management, all over! An inch a day—think of that! Five hundred years to go a trifle over three miles! But I am not a bit surprised. It's a Catholic glacier. You can tell by the look of it. And the management."

I said, no, I believed nothing but the extreme end of it was in a Catholic canton.

"Well, then, it's a government glacier," said Harris. "It's all the same. Over here the government runs everything—so everything's slow; slow, and ill-managed. But with us, everything's done by private enterprise—and then there ain't much lolling around, you can depend on it. I wish Tom Scott could get his hands on this torpid old slab once—you'd see it take a different gait from this."

I said I was sure he would increase the speed, if there was trade enough to justify it.

"He'd MAKE trade," said Harris. "That's the difference between governments and individuals. Governments don't care, individuals do. Tom Scott would take all the trade; in two years Gorner stock would go to two hundred, and inside of two more you would see all the other glaciers under the hammer for taxes." After a reflective pause, Harris added, "A little less than an inch a day; a little less than an INCH, mind you. Well, I'm losing my reverence for glaciers."

I was feeling much the same way myself. I have traveled by canal-boat, ox-wagon, raft, and by the Ephesus and Smyrna railway; but when it comes down to good solid honest slow motion, I bet my money on the glacier. As a means of passenger transportation, I consider the glacier a failure; but as a vehicle of slow freight, I think she fills the bill. In the matter of putting the fine shades on that line of business, I judge she could teach the Germans something.

I ordered the men to break camp and prepare for the land journey to Zermatt. At this moment a most interesting find was made; a dark object, bedded in the glacial ice, was cut out with the ice-axes, and it proved to be a piece of the undressed skin of some animal—a hair trunk, perhaps; but a close inspection disabled the hair-trunk theory, and further discussion and examination exploded it entirely—that is, in the opinion of all the scientists except the one who had advanced it. This one clung to his theory with affectionate fidelity characteristic of originators of scientific theories, and afterward won many of the first scientists of the age to his view, by a very able pamphlet which he wrote, entitled, "Evidences going to show that the hair trunk, in a wild state, belonged to the early glacial period, and roamed the wastes of chaos in the company with the cave-bear, primeval man, and the other Ooelitics of the Old Silurian family."



Each of our scientists had a theory of his own, and put forward an animal of his own as a candidate for the skin. I sided with the geologist of the Expedition in the belief that this patch of skin had once helped to cover a Siberian elephant, in some old forgotten age—but we divided there, the geologist believing that this discovery proved that Siberia had formerly been located where Switzerland is now, whereas I held the opinion that it merely proved that the primeval Swiss was not the dull savage he is represented to have been, but was a being of high intellectual development, who liked to go to the menagerie.

We arrived that evening, after many hardships and adventures, in some fields close to the great ice-arch where the mad Visp boils and surges out from under the foot of the great Gorner Glacier, and here we camped, our perils over and our magnificent undertaking successfully completed. We marched into Zermatt the next day, and were received with the most lavish honors and applause. A document, signed and sealed by the authorities, was given to me which established and endorsed the fact that I had made the ascent of the Riffelberg. This I wear around my neck, and it will be buried with me when I am no more.

CHAPTER XL

[Piteous Relics at Chamonix]

I am not so ignorant about glacial movement, now, as I was when I took passage on the Gorner Glacier. I have "read up" since. I am aware that these vast bodies of ice do not travel at the same rate of speed; while the Gorner Glacier makes less than an inch a day, the Unter-Aar Glacier makes as much as eight; and still other glaciers are said to go twelve, sixteen, and even twenty inches a day. One writer says that the slowest glacier travels twenty-five feet a year, and the fastest four hundred.

What is a glacier? It is easy to say it looks like a frozen river which occupies the bed of a winding gorge or gully between mountains. But that gives no notion of its vastness. For it is sometimes six hundred feet thick, and we are not accustomed to rivers six hundred feet deep; no,

our rivers are six feet, twenty feet, and sometimes fifty feet deep; we are not quite able to grasp so large a fact as an ice-river six hundred feet deep.

The glacier's surface is not smooth and level, but has deep swales and swelling elevations, and sometimes has the look of a tossing sea whose turbulent billows were frozen hard in the instant of their most violent motion; the glacier's surface is not a flawless mass, but is a river with cracks or crevices, some narrow, some gaping wide. Many a man, the victim of a slip or a misstep, has plunged down one of these and met his death. Men have been fished out of them alive; but it was when they did not go to a great depth; the cold of the great depths would quickly stupefy a man, whether he was hurt or unhurt. These cracks do not go straight down; one can seldom see more than twenty to forty feet down them; consequently men who have disappeared in them have been sought for, in the hope that they had stopped within helping distance, whereas their case, in most instances, had really been hopeless from the beginning.

In 1864 a party of tourists was descending Mont Blanc, and while picking their way over one of the mighty glaciers of that lofty region, roped together, as was proper, a young porter disengaged himself from the line and started across an ice-bridge which spanned a crevice. It broke under him with a crash, and he disappeared. The others could not see how deep he had gone, so it might be worthwhile to try and rescue him. A brave young guide named Michel Payot volunteered.

Two ropes were made fast to his leather belt and he bore the end of a third one in his hand to tie to the victim in case he found him. He was lowered into the crevice, he descended deeper and deeper between the clear blue walls of solid ice, he approached a bend in the crack and disappeared under it. Down, and still down, he went, into this profound grave; when he had reached a depth of eighty feet he passed under another bend in the crack, and thence descended eighty feet lower, as between perpendicular precipices. Arrived at this stage of one hundred and sixty feet below the surface of the glacier, he peered through the twilight dimness and perceived that the chasm took another turn and stretched away at a steep slant to unknown deeps, for its course was lost in darkness. What a place that was to be in—especially if that leather belt should break! The compression of the belt threatened to suffocate the intrepid fellow; he called to his friends to draw him up, but could not make them hear. They still lowered him, deeper and deeper. Then he jerked his third cord as vigorously as he could; his friends understood, and dragged him out of those icy jaws of death.

Then they attached a bottle to a cord and sent it down two hundred feet, but it found no bottom. It came up covered with congelations—evidence enough that even if the poor porter reached the bottom with unbroken bones, a swift death from cold was sure, anyway.

A glacier is a stupendous, ever-progressing, resistless plow. It pushes ahead of it masses of boulders which are packed together, and they stretch across the gorge, right in front of it, like a long grave or a long, sharp roof. This is called a moraine. It also shoves out a moraine along each side of its course.



Imposing as the modern glaciers are, they are not so huge as were some that once existed. For instance, Mr. Whymper says:

"At some very remote period the Valley of Aosta was occupied by a vast glacier, which flowed

down its entire length from Mont Blanc to the plain of Piedmont, remained stationary, or nearly so, at its mouth for many centuries, and deposited there enormous masses of debris. The length of this glacier exceeded EIGHTY MILES, and it drained a basin twenty-five to thirty-five miles across, bounded by the highest mountains in the Alps.



"The great peaks rose several thousand feet above the glaciers, and then, as now, shattered by sun and frost, poured down their showers of rocks and stones, in witness of which there are the immense piles of angular fragments that constitute the moraines of Ivrea.

"The moraines around Ivrea are of extraordinary dimensions. That which was on the left bank of the glacier is about THIRTEEN MILES long, and in some places rises to a height of TWO THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FEET above the floor of the valley! The terminal moraines (those which are pushed in front of the glaciers) cover something like twenty square miles of country. At the mouth of the Valley of Aosta, the thickness of the glacier must have been at least TWO THOUSAND feet, and its width, at that part, FIVE MILES AND A QUARTER."



It is not easy to get at a comprehension of a mass of ice like that. If one could cleave off the butt end of such a glacier—an oblong block two or three miles wide by five and a quarter long and two thousand feet thick—he could completely hide the city of New York under it, and Trinity steeple would only stick up into it relatively as far as a shingle-nail would stick up into the bottom of a Saratoga trunk.

"The boulders from Mont Blanc, upon the plain below Ivrea, assure us that the glacier which transported them existed for a prodigious length of time. Their present distance from the cliffs from which they were derived is about 420,000 feet, and if we assume that they traveled at the rate of 400 feet per annum, their journey must have occupied them no less than 1,055 years! In all probability they did not travel so fast."



GLACIER OF ZAMATT WITH LATERAL MORAINES.

Glaciers are sometimes hurried out of their characteristic snail-pace. A marvelous spectacle is presented then. Mr. Whymper refers to a case which occurred in Iceland in 1721:

"It seems that in the neighborhood of the mountain Kotlugja, large bodies of water formed underneath, or within the glaciers (either on account of the interior heat of the earth, or from other causes), and at length acquired irresistible power, tore the glaciers from their mooring on the land, and swept them over every obstacle into the sea. Prodigious masses of ice were thus borne for a distance of about ten miles over land in the space of a few hours; and their bulk was

so enormous that they covered the sea for seven miles from the shore, and remained aground in six hundred feet of water! The denudation of the land was upon a grand scale. All superficial accumulations were swept away, and the bedrock was exposed. It was described, in graphic language, how all irregularities and depressions were obliterated, and a smooth surface of several miles' area laid bare, and that this area had the appearance of having been PLANED BY A PLANE."

The account translated from the Icelandic says that the mountainlike ruins of this majestic glacier so covered the sea that as far as the eye could reach no open water was discoverable, even from the highest peaks. A monster wall or barrier of ice was built across a considerable stretch of land, too, by this strange irruption:

"One can form some idea of the altitude of this barrier of ice when it is mentioned that from Hofdabrekka farm, which lies high up on a fjeld, one could not see Hjorleifshofdi opposite, which is a fell six hundred and forty feet in height; but in order to do so had to clamber up a mountain slope east of Hofdabrekka twelve hundred feet high."

These things will help the reader to understand why it is that a man who keeps company with glaciers comes to feel tolerably insignificant by and by. The Alps and the glaciers together are able to take every bit of conceit out of a man and reduce his self-importance to zero if he will only remain within the influence of their sublime presence long enough to give it a fair and reasonable chance to do its work.

The Alpine glaciers move—that is granted, now, by everybody. But there was a time when people scoffed at the idea; they said you might as well expect leagues of solid rock to crawl along the ground as expect leagues of ice to do it. But proof after proof was furnished, and the finally the world had to believe.

The wise men not only said the glacier moved, but they timed its movement. They ciphered out a glacier's gait, and then said confidently that it would travel just so far in so many years. There is record of a striking and curious example of the accuracy which may be attained in these reckonings.

In 1820 the ascent of Mont Blanc was attempted by a Russian and two Englishmen, with seven guides. They had reached a prodigious altitude, and were approaching the summit, when an avalanche swept several of the party down a sharp slope of two hundred feet and hurled five of them (all guides) into one of the crevices of a glacier. The life of one of the five was saved by a long barometer which was strapped to his back—it bridged the crevice and suspended him until help came. The alpenstock or baton of another saved its owner in a similar way. Three men were lost—Pierre Balmat, Pierre Carrier, and Auguste Tairraz. They had been hurled down into the fathomless great deeps of the crevice.

Dr. Forbes, the English geologist, had made frequent visits to the Mont Blanc region, and had given much attention to the disputed question of the movement of glaciers. During one of these visits he completed his estimates of the rate of movement of the glacier which had swallowed up the three guides, and uttered the prediction that the glacier would deliver up its dead at the foot of the mountain thirty-five years from the time of the accident, or possibly forty.

A dull, slow journey—a movement imperceptible to any eye—but it was proceeding, nevertheless, and without cessation. It was a journey which a rolling stone would make in a few seconds—the lofty point of departure was visible from the village below in the valley.

The prediction cut curiously close to the truth; forty-one years after the catastrophe, the remains were cast forth at the foot of the glacier.

I find an interesting account of the matter in the HISTOIRE DU MONT BLANC, by Stephen d'Arve. I will condense this account, as follows:

On the 12th of August, 1861, at the hour of the close of mass, a guide arrived out of breath at the mairie of Chamonix, and bearing on his shoulders a very lugubrious burden. It was a sack filled with human remains which he had gathered from the orifice of a crevice in the Glacier des Bossons. He conjectured that these were remains of the victims of the catastrophe of 1820, and a minute inquest, immediately instituted by the local authorities, soon demonstrated the correctness of his supposition. The contents of the sack were spread upon a long table, and officially inventoried, as follows:

Portions of three human skulls. Several tufts of black and blonde hair. A human jaw, furnished with fine white teeth. A forearm and hand, all the fingers of the latter intact. The flesh was white and fresh, and both the arm and hand preserved a degree of flexibility in the articulations.

The ring-finger had suffered a slight abrasion, and the stain of the blood was still visible and unchanged after forty-one years. A left foot, the flesh white and fresh.

Along with these fragments were portions of waistcoats, hats, hobnailed shoes, and other clothing; a wing of a pigeon, with black feathers; a fragment of an alpenstock; a tin lantern; and lastly, a boiled leg of mutton, the only flesh among all the remains that exhaled an unpleasant odor. The guide said that the mutton had no odor when he took it from the glacier; an hour's exposure to the sun had already begun the work of decomposition upon it.

Persons were called for, to identify these poor pathetic relics, and a touching scene ensued.

Two men were still living who had witnessed the grim catastrophe of nearly half a century before—Marie Couttet (saved by his baton) and Julien Davouassoux (saved by the barometer). These aged men entered and approached the table. Davouassoux, more than eighty years old, contemplated the mournful remains mutely and with a vacant eye, for his intelligence and his memory were torpid with age; but Couttet's faculties were still perfect at seventy-two, and he exhibited strong emotion. He said:

"Pierre Balmat was fair; he wore a straw hat. This bit of skull, with the tuft of blond hair, was his; this is his hat. Pierre Carrier was very dark; this skull was his, and this felt hat. This is Balmat's hand, I remember it so well!" and the old man bent down and kissed it reverently, then closed his fingers upon it in an affectionate grasp, crying out, "I could never have dared to believe that before quitting this world it would be granted me to press once more the hand of one of those brave comrades, the hand of my good friend Balmat."



There is something weirdly pathetic about the picture of that white-haired veteran greeting with his loving handshake this friend who had been dead forty years. When these hands had met last, they were alike in the softness and freshness of youth; now, one was brown and wrinkled and horny with age, while the other was still as young and fair and blemishless as if those forty years had come and gone in a single moment, leaving no mark of their passage. Time had gone on, in the one case; it had stood still in the other. A man who has not seen a friend for a generation, keeps him in mind always as he saw him last, and is somehow surprised, and is also shocked, to see the aging change the years have wrought when he sees him again. Marie Couttet's experience, in finding his friend's hand unaltered from the image of it which he had carried in his memory for forty years, is an experience which stands alone in the history of man, perhaps.

Couttet identified other relics:

"This hat belonged to Auguste Tairraz. He carried the cage of pigeons which we proposed to set free upon the summit. Here is the wing of one of those pigeons. And here is the fragment of my broken baton; it was by grace of that baton that my life was saved. Who could have told me that I should one day have the satisfaction to look again upon this bit of wood that supported me above the grave that swallowed up my unfortunate companions!"

No portions of the body of Tairraz, other than a piece of the skull, had been found. A diligent search was made, but without result. However, another search was instituted a year later, and this had better success. Many fragments of clothing which had belonged to the lost guides were discovered; also, part of a lantern, and a green veil with blood-stains on it. But the interesting feature was this:

One of the searchers came suddenly upon a sleeved arm projecting from a crevice in the ice-wall, with the hand outstretched as if offering greeting! "The nails of this white hand were still rosy, and the pose of the extended fingers seemed to express an eloquent welcome to the long-lost light of day."

The hand and arm were alone; there was no trunk. After being removed from the ice the flesh-tints quickly faded out and the rosy nails took on the alabaster hue of death. This was the third RIGHT hand found; therefore, all three of the lost men were accounted for, beyond cavil or question.

Dr. Hamel was the Russian gentleman of the party which made the ascent at the time of the famous disaster. He left Chamonix as soon as he conveniently could after the descent; and as he had shown a chilly indifference about the calamity, and offered neither sympathy nor assistance to the widows and orphans, he carried with him the cordial execrations of the whole community. Four months before the first remains were found, a Chamonix guide named Balmat—a relative of one of the lost men—was in London, and one day encountered a hale old gentleman in the British Museum, who said:

"I overheard your name. Are you from Chamonix, Monsieur Balmat?"

"Yes, sir."

"Haven't they found the bodies of my three guides, yet? I am Dr. Hamel."

"Alas, no, monsieur."

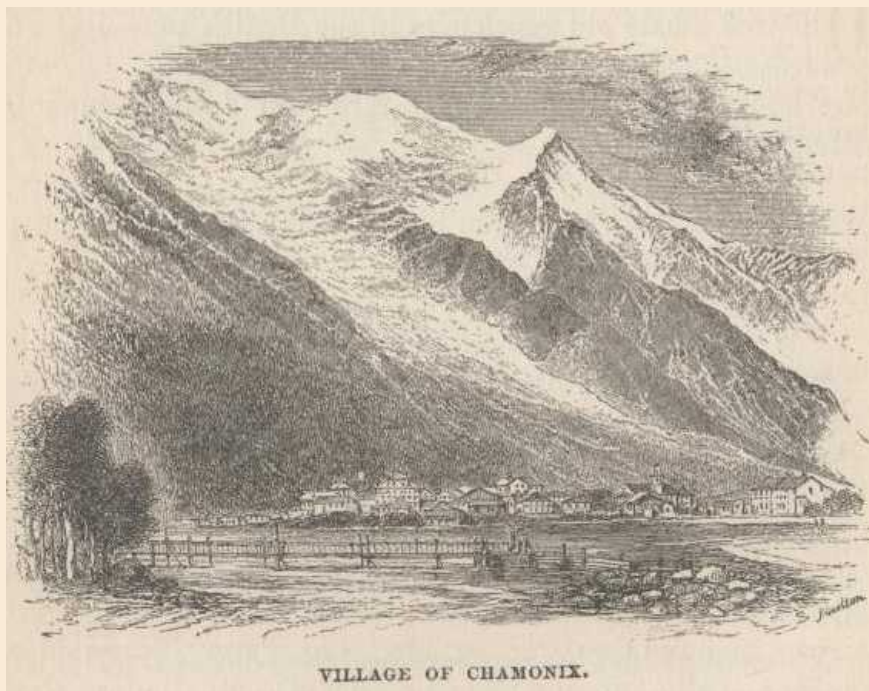
"Well, you'll find them, sooner or later."

"Yes, it is the opinion of Dr. Forbes and Mr. Tyndall, that the glacier will sooner or later restore to us the remains of the unfortunate victims."

"Without a doubt, without a doubt. And it will be a great thing for Chamonix, in the matter of attracting tourists. You can get up a museum with those remains that will draw!"

This savage idea has not improved the odor of Dr. Hamel's name in Chamonix by any means. But after all, the man was sound on human nature. His idea was conveyed to the public officials of Chamonix, and they gravely discussed it around the official council-table. They were only prevented from carrying it into execution by the determined opposition of the friends and descendants of the lost guides, who insisted on giving the remains Christian burial, and succeeded in their purpose.

A close watch had to be kept upon all the poor remnants and fragments, to prevent embezzlement. A few accessory odds and ends were sold. Rags and scraps of the coarse clothing were parted with at the rate equal to about twenty dollars a yard; a piece of a lantern and one or two other trifles brought nearly their weight in gold; and an Englishman offered a pound sterling for a single breeches-button.



CHAPTER XLI

[The Fearful Disaster of 1865]

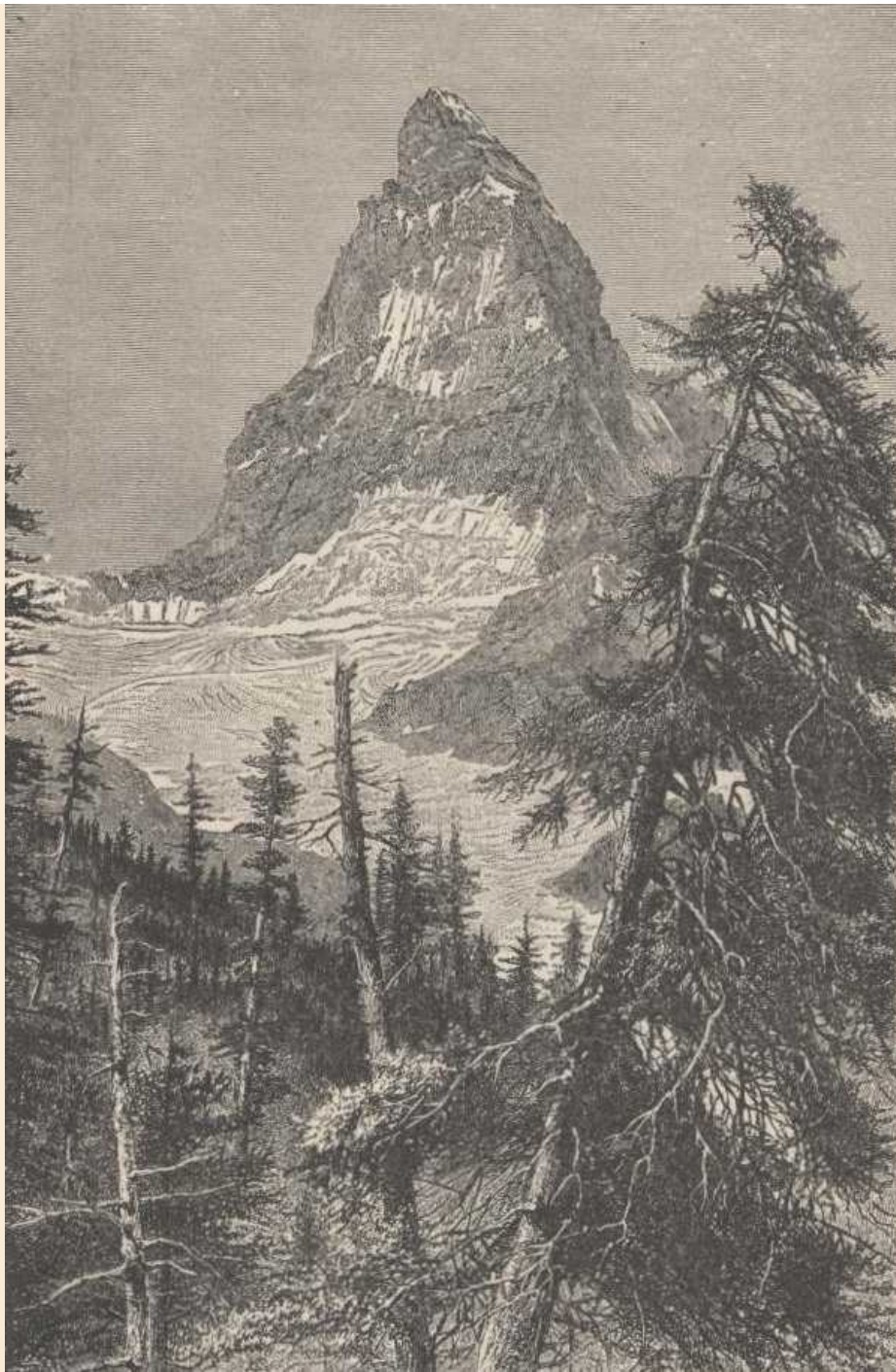
One of the most memorable of all the Alpine catastrophes was that of July, 1865, on the Matterhorn—already slightly referred to, a few pages back. The details of it are scarcely known in America. To the vast majority of readers they are not known at all. Mr. Whymper's account is the only authentic one. I will import the chief portion of it into this book, partly because of its intrinsic interest, and partly because it gives such a vivid idea of what the perilous pastime of Alp-climbing is. This was Mr. Whymper's NINTH attempt during a series of years, to vanquish that steep and stubborn pillar or rock; it succeeded, the other eight were failures. No man had ever accomplished the ascent before, though the attempts had been numerous.

MR. WHYMPER'S NARRATIVE

We started from Zermatt on the 13th of July, at half past five, on a brilliant and perfectly cloudless morning. We were eight in number—Croz (guide), old Peter Taugwalder (guide) and his two sons; Lord F. Douglas, Mr. Hadow, Rev. Mr. Hudson, and I. To insure steady motion, one tourist and one native walked together. The youngest Taugwalder fell to my share. The wine-bags also fell to my lot to carry, and throughout the day, after each drink, I replenished them secretly with water, so that at the next halt they were found fuller than before! This was considered a good omen, and little short of miraculous.

On the first day we did not intend to ascend to any great height, and we mounted, accordingly, very leisurely. Before twelve o'clock we had found a good position for the tent, at a height of eleven thousand feet. We passed the remaining hours of daylight—some basking in the sunshine, some sketching, some collecting; Hudson made tea, I coffee, and at length we retired, each one to his blanket bag.

We assembled together before dawn on the 14th and started directly it was light enough to move. One of the young Taugwalders returned to Zermatt. In a few minutes we turned the rib which had intercepted the view of the eastern face from our tent platform. The whole of this great slope was now revealed, rising for three thousand feet like a huge natural staircase. Some parts were more, and others were less easy, but we were not once brought to a halt by any serious impediment, for when an obstruction was met in front it could always be turned to the right or to the left. For the greater part of the way there was no occasion, indeed, for the rope, and sometimes Hudson led, sometimes myself. At six-twenty we had attained a height of twelve thousand eight hundred feet, and halted for half an hour; we then continued the ascent without a break until nine-fifty-five, when we stopped for fifty minutes, at a height of fourteen thousand feet.

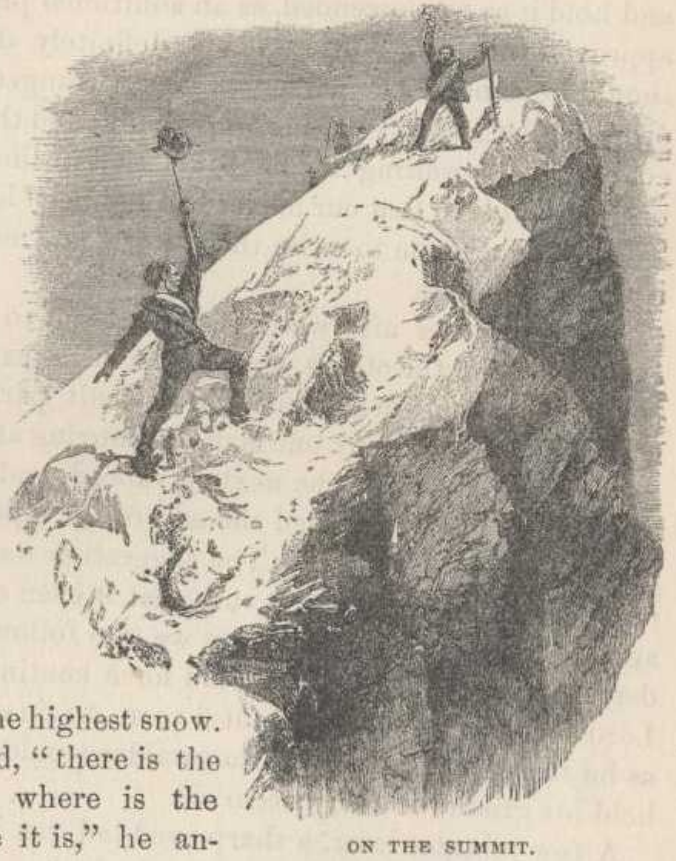


We had now arrived at the foot of that part which, seen from the Riffelberg, seems perpendicular or overhanging. We could no longer continue on the eastern side. For a little distance we ascended by snow upon the ARÊTE—that is, the ridge—then turned over to the right, or northern side. The work became difficult, and required caution. In some places there was little to hold; the general slope of the mountain was LESS than forty degrees, and snow had accumulated in, and had filled up, the interstices of the rock-face, leaving only occasional fragments projecting here and there. These were at times covered with a thin film of ice. It was a place which any fair mountaineer might pass in safety. We bore away nearly horizontally for about four hundred feet, then ascended directly toward the summit for about sixty feet, then doubled back to the ridge which descends toward Zermatt. A long stride round a rather awkward corner brought us to snow once more. That last doubt vanished! The Matterhorn was ours! Nothing but two hundred feet of easy snow remained to be surmounted.

The higher we rose, the more intense became the excitement. The slope eased off, at length we could be detached, and Croz and I, dashed away, ran a neck-and-neck race, which ended in a dead heat. At 1:40 P.M., the world was at our feet, and the Matterhorn was conquered!

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The others arrived. Croz now took the tent-pole, and planted it in the highest snow. "Yes" we said, "there is the flag-staff, but where is the flag?" "Here it is," he an-



The others arrived. Croz now took the tent-pole, and planted it in the highest snow. "Yes," we said, "there is the flag-staff, but where is the flag?" "Here it is," he answered, pulling off his blouse and fixing it to the stick. It made a poor flag, and there was no wind to float it out, yet it was seen all around. They saw it at Zermatt—at the Riffel—in the Val Tournanche...

We remained on the summit for one hour—

One crowded hour of glorious life.

It passed away too quickly, and we began to prepare for the descent.

Hudson and I consulted as to the best and safest arrangement of the party. We agreed that it was best for Croz to go first, and Hadow second; Hudson, who was almost equal to a guide in sureness of foot, wished to be third; Lord Douglas was placed next, and old Peter, the strongest of the remainder, after him. I suggested to Hudson that we should attach a rope to the rocks on our arrival at the difficult bit, and hold it as we descended, as an additional protection. He approved the idea, but it was not definitely decided that it should be done. The party was being arranged in the above order while I was sketching the summit, and they had finished, and were waiting for me to be tied in line, when some one remembered that our names had not been left in a bottle. They requested me to write them down, and moved off while it was being done.

A few minutes afterward I tied myself to young Peter, ran down after the others, and caught them just as they were commencing the descent of the difficult part. Great care was being taken. Only one man was moving at a time; when he was firmly planted the next advanced, and so on. They had not, however, attached the additional rope to rocks, and nothing was said about it. The suggestion was not made for my own sake, and I am not sure that it ever occurred to me again. For some little distance we two followed the others, detached from them, and should have continued so had not Lord Douglas asked me, about 3 P.M., to tie on to old Peter, as he feared, he said, that Taugwalder would not be able to hold his ground if a slip occurred.

A few minutes later, a sharp-eyed lad ran into the Monte Rosa Hotel, at Zermatt, saying that he had seen an avalanche fall from the summit of the Matterhorn onto the Matterhorn glacier. The boy was reproved for telling idle stories; he was right, nevertheless, and this was what he saw.

Michel Croz had laid aside his ax, and in order to give Mr. Hadow greater security, was absolutely taking hold of his legs, and putting his feet, one by one, into their proper positions. As far as I know, no one was actually descending. I cannot speak with certainty, because the two

leading men were partially hidden from my sight by an intervening mass of rock, but it is my belief, from the movements of their shoulders, that Croz, having done as I said, was in the act of turning round to go down a step or two himself; at this moment Mr. Hadow slipped, fell against him, and knocked him over. I heard one startled exclamation from Croz, then saw him and Mr. Hadow flying downward; in another moment Hudson was dragged from his steps, and Lord Douglas immediately after him. All this was the work of a moment. Immediately we heard Croz's exclamation, old Peter and I planted ourselves as firmly as the rocks would permit; the rope was taut between us, and the jerk came on us both as on one man. We held; but the rope broke midway between Taugwalder and Lord Francis Douglas. For a few seconds we saw our unfortunate companions sliding downward on their backs, and spreading out their hands, endeavoring to save themselves. They passed from our sight uninjured, disappeared one by one, and fell from the precipice to precipice onto the Matterhorn glacier below, a distance of nearly four thousand feet in height. From the moment the rope broke it was impossible to help them. So perished our comrades!

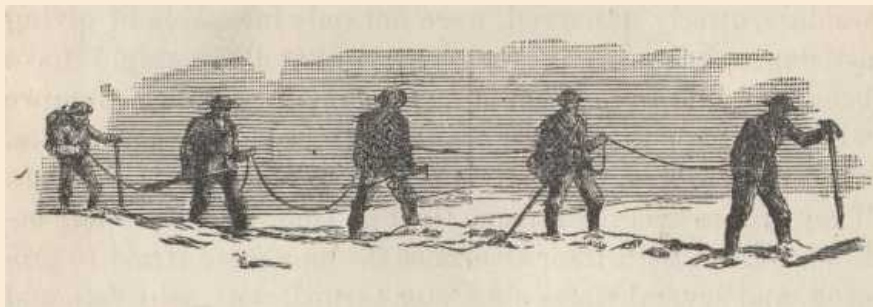


For more than two hours afterward I thought almost every moment that the next would be my last; for the Taugwalders, utterly unnerved, were not only incapable of giving assistance, but were in such a state that a slip might have been expected from them at any moment. After a time we were able to do that which should have been done at first, and fixed rope to firm rocks, in addition to being tied together. These ropes were cut from time to time, and were left behind. Even with their assurance the men were afraid to proceed, and several times old Peter turned, with ashy face and faltering limbs, and said, with terrible emphasis, "I CANNOT!"

About 6 P.M., we arrived at the snow upon the ridge descending toward Zermatt, and all peril was over. We frequently looked, but in vain, for traces of our unfortunate companions; we bent over the ridge and cried to them, but no sound returned. Convinced at last that they were neither within sight nor hearing, we ceased from our useless efforts; and, too cast down for speech, silently gathered up our things, and the little effects of those who were lost, and then completed the descent.

Such is Mr. Whymper's graphic and thrilling narrative. Zermatt gossip darkly hints that the elder Taugwalder cut the rope, when the accident occurred, in order to preserve himself from being dragged into the abyss; but Mr. Whymper says that the ends of the rope showed no evidence of cutting, but only of breaking. He adds that if Taugwalder had had the disposition to cut the rope, he would not have had time to do it, the accident was so sudden and unexpected.

Lord Douglas' body has never been found. It probably lodged upon some inaccessible shelf in the face of the mighty precipice. Lord Douglas was a youth of nineteen. The three other victims fell nearly four thousand feet, and their bodies lay together upon the glacier when found by Mr. Whymper and the other searchers the next morning. Their graves are beside the little church in Zermatt.



CHAPTER XLII

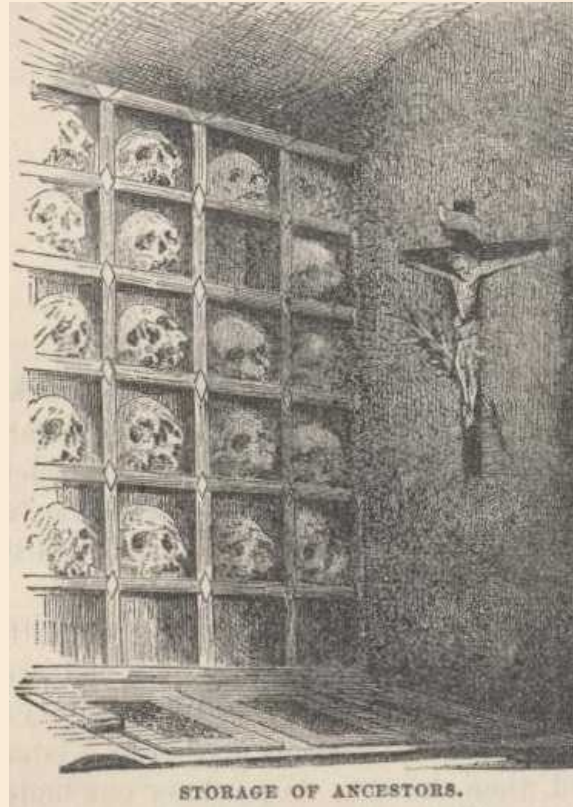
[Chillon has a Nice, Roomy Dungeon]

Switzerland is simply a large, humpy, solid rock, with a thin skin of grass stretched over it. Consequently, they do not dig graves, they blast them out with powder and fuse. They cannot afford to have large graveyards, the grass skin is too circumscribed and too valuable. It is all required for the support of the living.

The graveyard in Zermatt occupies only about one-eighth of an acre. The graves are sunk in the living rock, and are very permanent; but occupation of them is only temporary; the occupant can only stay till his grave is needed by a later subject, he is removed, then, for they do not bury one body on top of another. As I understand it, a family owns a grave, just as it owns a house. A man dies and leaves his house to his son—and at the same time, this dead father succeeds to his own father's grave. He moves out of the house and into the grave, and his predecessor moves out of the grave and into the cellar of the chapel. I saw a black box lying in the churchyard, with skull and cross-bones painted on it, and was told that this was used in transferring remains to the cellar.

In that cellar the bones and skulls of several hundred of former citizens were compactly corded up. They made a pile eighteen feet long, seven feet high, and eight feet wide. I was told that in

some of the receptacles of this kind in the Swiss villages, the skulls were all marked, and if a man wished to find the skulls of his ancestors for several generations back, he could do it by these marks, preserved in the family records.



An English gentleman who had lived some years in this region, said it was the cradle of compulsory education. But he said that the English idea that compulsory education would reduce bastardy and intemperance was an error—it has not that effect. He said there was more seduction in the Protestant than in the Catholic cantons, because the confessional protected the girls. I wonder why it doesn't protect married women in France and Spain?

This gentleman said that among the poorer peasants in the Valais, it was common for the brothers in a family to cast lots to determine which of them should have the coveted privilege of marrying, and his brethren—doomed bachelors—heroically banded themselves together to help support the new family.

We left Zermatt in a wagon—and in a rain-storm, too—for St. Nicholas about ten o'clock one morning. Again we passed between those grass-clad prodigious cliffs, specked with wee dwellings peeping over at us from velvety green walls ten and twelve hundred feet high. It did not seem possible that the imaginary chamois even could climb those precipices. Lovers on opposite cliffs probably kiss through a spy-glass, and correspond with a rifle.

In Switzerland the farmer's plow is a wide shovel, which scrapes up and turns over the thin earthy skin of his native rock—and there the man of the plow is a hero. Now here, by our St. Nicholas road, was a grave, and it had a tragic story. A plowman was skinning his farm one morning—not the steepest part of it, but still a steep part—that is, he was not skinning the front of his farm, but the roof of it, near the eaves—when he absent-mindedly let go of the plow-handles to moisten his hands, in the usual way; he lost his balance and fell out of his farm backward; poor fellow, he never touched anything till he struck bottom, fifteen hundred feet below. [This was on a Sunday.—M.T.] We throw a halo of heroism around the life of the soldier and the sailor, because of the deadly dangers they are facing all the time. But we are not used to looking upon farming as a heroic occupation. This is because we have not lived in Switzerland.



FALLING OUT OF HIS FARM.

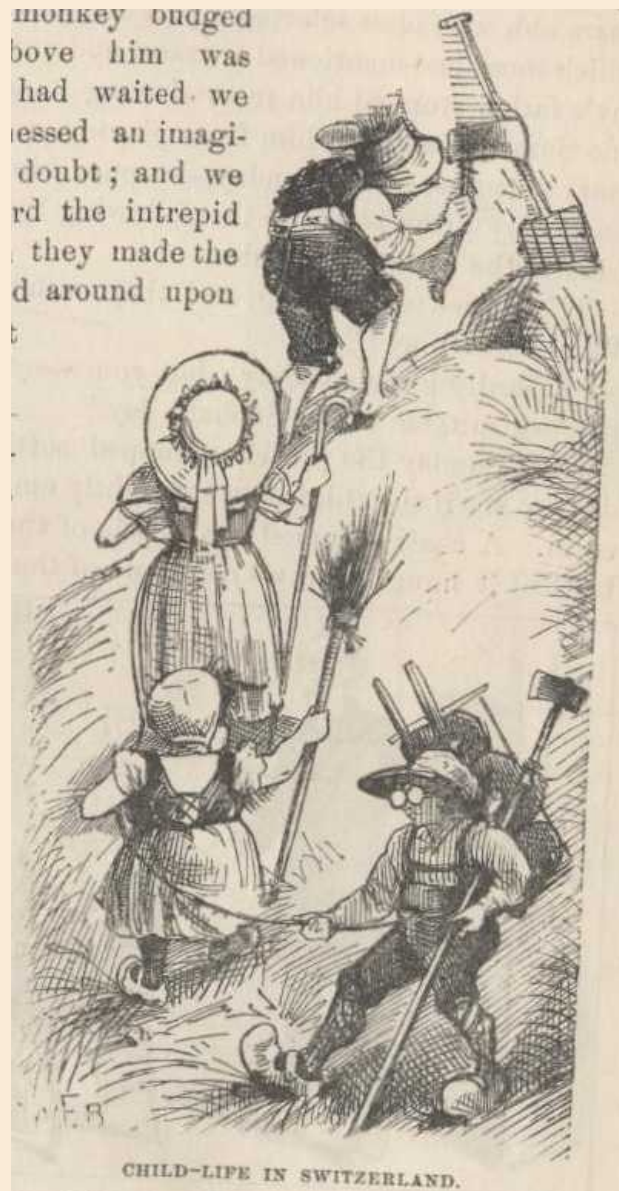
From St. Nicholas we struck out for Visp—or Vispach—on foot. The rain-storms had been at work during several days, and had done a deal of damage in Switzerland and Savoy. We came to one place where a stream had changed its course and plunged down a mountain in a new place, sweeping everything before it. Two poor but precious farms by the roadside were ruined. One was washed clear away, and the bed-rock exposed; the other was buried out of sight under a tumbled chaos of rocks, gravel, mud, and rubbish. The resistless might of water was well exemplified. Some saplings which had stood in the way were bent to the ground, stripped clean of their bark, and buried under rocky debris. The road had been swept away, too.

In another place, where the road was high up on the mountain's face, and its outside edge protected by flimsy masonry, we frequently came across spots where this masonry had carved off and left dangerous gaps for mules to get over; and with still more frequency we found the masonry slightly crumbled, and marked by mule-hoofs, thus showing that there had been danger of an accident to somebody. When at last we came to a badly ruptured bit of masonry, with hoof-prints evidencing a desperate struggle to regain the lost foothold, I looked quite hopefully over the dizzy precipice. But there was nobody down there.

They take exceedingly good care of their rivers in Switzerland and other portions of Europe. They wall up both banks with slanting solid stone masonry—so that from end to end of these rivers the banks look like the wharves at St. Louis and other towns on the Mississippi River.

It was during this walk from St. Nicholas, in the shadow of the majestic Alps, that we came across some little children amusing themselves in what seemed, at first, a most odd and original way—but it wasn't; it was in simply a natural and characteristic way. They were roped together with a string, they had mimic alpenstocks and ice-axes, and were climbing a meek and lowly manure-pile with a most blood-curdling amount of care and caution. The "guide" at the head of the line cut imaginary steps, in a laborious and painstaking way, and not a monkey budged till the step above was vacated. If we had waited we should have witnessed an imaginary accident,

no doubt; and we should have heard the intrepid band hurrah when they made the summit and looked around upon the "magnificent view," and seen them throw themselves down in exhausted attitudes for a rest in that commanding situation.



In Nevada I used to see the children play at silver-mining. Of course, the great thing was an accident in a mine, and there were two "star" parts; that of the man who fell down the mimic shaft, and that of the daring hero who was lowered into the depths to bring him up. I knew one small chap who always insisted on playing BOTH of these parts—and he carried his point. He would tumble into the shaft and die, and then come to the surface and go back after his own remains.

It is the smartest boy that gets the hero part everywhere; he is head guide in Switzerland, head miner in Nevada, head bull-fighter in Spain, etc.; but I knew a preacher's son, seven years old, who once selected a part for himself compared to which those just mentioned are tame and unimpressive. Jimmy's father stopped him from driving imaginary horse-cars one Sunday—stopped him from playing captain of an imaginary steamboat next Sunday—stopped him from leading an imaginary army to battle the following Sunday—and so on. Finally the little fellow said:

"I've tried everything, and they won't any of them do. What CAN I play?"

"I hardly know, Jimmy; but you MUST play only things that are suitable to the Sabbath-day."

Next Sunday the preacher stepped softly to a back-room door to see if the children were rightly employed. He peeped in. A chair occupied the middle of the room, and on the back of it hung

Jimmy's cap; one of his little sisters took the cap down, nibbled at it, then passed it to another small sister and said, "Eat of this fruit, for it is good." The Reverend took in the situation—alas, they were playing the Expulsion from Eden! Yet he found one little crumb of comfort. He said to himself, "For once Jimmy has yielded the chief role—I have been wronging him, I did not believe there was so much modesty in him; I should have expected him to be either Adam or Eve." This crumb of comfort lasted but a very little while; he glanced around and discovered Jimmy standing in an imposing attitude in a corner, with a dark and deadly frown on his face. What that meant was very plain—HE WAS IMPERSONATING THE DEITY! Think of the guileless sublimity of that idea.



We reached Vispach at 8 P.M., only about seven hours out from St. Nicholas. So we must have made fully a mile and a half an hour, and it was all downhill, too, and very muddy at that. We stayed all night at the Hotel de Soleil; I remember it because the landlady, the portier, the waitress, and the chambermaid were not separate persons, but were all contained in one neat and chipper suit of spotless muslin, and she was the prettiest young creature I saw in all that region. She was the landlord's daughter. And I remember that the only native match to her I saw in all Europe was the young daughter of the landlord of a village inn in the Black Forest. Why don't more people in Europe marry and keep hotel?

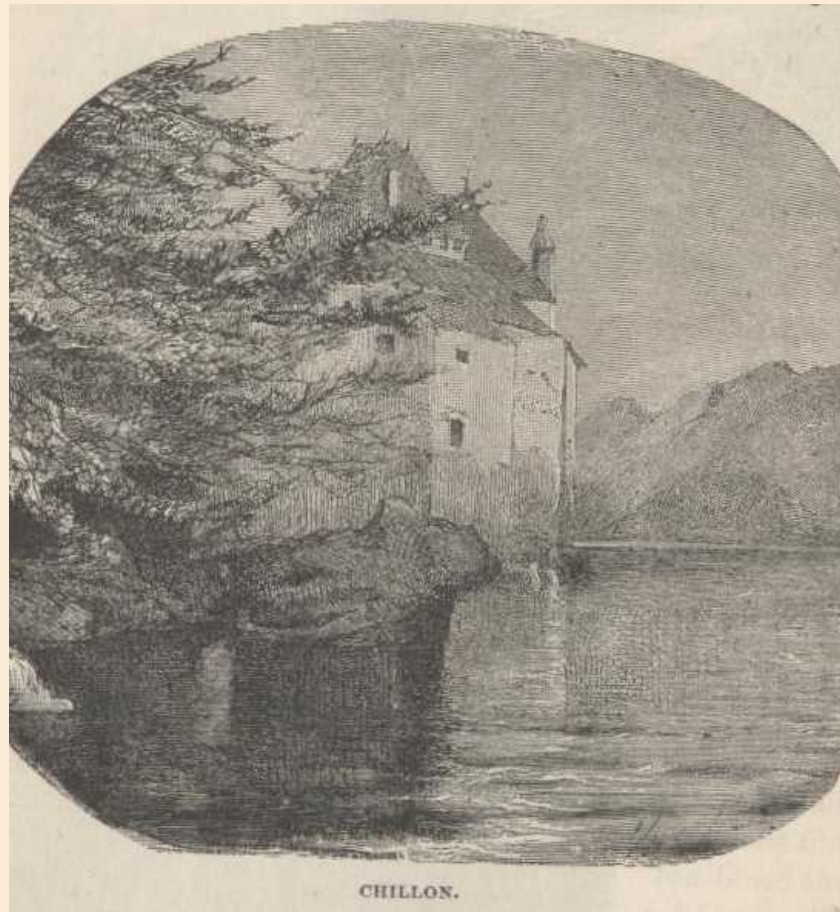


Next morning we left with a family of English friends and went by train to Brevet, and thence by boat across the lake to Ouchy (Lausanne).

Ouchy is memorable to me, not on account of its beautiful situation and lovely surroundings—although these would make it stick long in one's memory—but as the place where I caught the London TIMES dropping into humor. It was NOT aware of it, though. It did not do it on purpose. An English friend called my attention to this lapse, and cut out the reprehensible paragraph for me. Think of encountering a grin like this on the face of that grim journal:


ERRATUM.—We are requested by Reuter's Telegram Company to correct an erroneous announcement made in their Brisbane telegram of the 2d inst., published in our impression of the 5th inst., stating that "Lady Kennedy had given birth to twins, the eldest being a son." The Company explain that the message they received contained the words "Governor of Queensland, TWINS FIRST SON." Being, however, subsequently informed that Sir Arthur Kennedy was unmarried and that there must be some mistake, a telegraphic repetition was at once demanded. It has been received today (11th inst.) and shows that the words really telegraphed by Reuter's agent were "Governor Queensland TURNS FIRST SOD," alluding to the Maryborough-Gympic Railway in course of construction. The words in italics were mutilated by the telegraph in transmission from Australia, and reaching the company in the form mentioned above gave rise to the mistake.

I had always had a deep and reverent compassion for the sufferings of the "prisoner of Chillon," whose story Byron had told in such moving verse; so I took the steamer and made pilgrimage to the dungeons of the Castle of Chillon, to see the place where poor Bonivard endured his dreary captivity three hundred years ago. I am glad I did that, for it took away some of the pain I was feeling on the prisoner's account. His dungeon was a nice, cool, roomy place, and I cannot see why he should have been dissatisfied with it. If he had been imprisoned in a St. Nicholas private dwelling, where the fertilizer prevails, and the goat sleeps with the guest, and the chickens roost on him and the cow comes in and bothers him when he wants to muse, it would have been another matter altogether; but he surely could not have had a very cheerless time of it in that pretty dungeon. It has romantic window-slits that let in generous bars of light, and it has tall, noble columns, carved apparently from the living rock; and what is more, they are written all over with thousands of names; some of them—like Byron's and Victor Hugo's—of the first celebrity. Why didn't he amuse himself reading these names? Then there are the couriers and tourists—swarms of them every day—what was to hinder him from having a good time with them? I think Bonivard's sufferings have been overrated.



Next, we took the train and went to Martigny, on the way to Mont Blanc. Next morning we started, about eight o'clock, on foot. We had plenty of company, in the way of wagon-loads and mule-loads of tourists—and dust. This scattering procession of travelers was perhaps a mile long. The road was uphill—interminable uphill—and tolerably steep. The weather was blisteringly hot, and the man or woman who had to sit on a creeping mule, or in a crawling wagon, and broil in the beating sun, was an object to be pitied. We could dodge among the bushes, and have the relief of shade, but those people could not. They paid for a conveyance, and to get their money's worth they rode.

We went by the way of the Tête Noir, and after we reached high ground there was no lack of fine scenery. In one place the road was tunneled through a shoulder of the mountain; from there one looked down into a gorge with a rushing torrent in it, and on every hand was a charming view of rocky buttresses and wooded heights. There was a liberal allowance of pretty waterfalls, too, on the Tête Noir route.



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THE TETE NOIR.

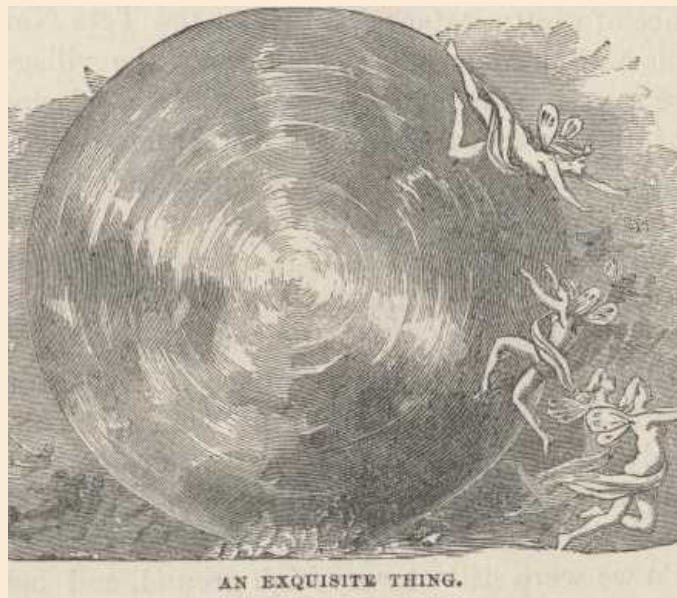
About half an hour before we reached the village of Argentière a vast dome of snow with the sun blazing on it drifted into view and framed itself in a strong V-shaped gateway of the mountains, and we recognized Mont Blanc, the "monarch of the Alps." With every step, after that, this stately dome rose higher and higher into the blue sky, and at last seemed to occupy the zenith.

Some of Mont Blanc's neighbors—bare, light-brown, steeplelike rocks—were very peculiarly shaped. Some were whittled to a sharp point, and slightly bent at the upper end, like a lady's finger; one monster sugar-loaf resembled a bishop's hat; it was too steep to hold snow on its sides, but had some in the division.



While we were still on very high ground, and before the descent toward Argentière began, we looked up toward a neighboring mountain-top, and saw exquisite prismatic colors playing about some white clouds which were so delicate as to almost resemble gossamer webs. The faint pinks and greens were peculiarly beautiful; none of the colors were deep, they were the lightest shades. They were bewitching commingled. We sat down to study and enjoy this singular spectacle. The tints remained during several minutes—flitting, changing, melting into each other; paling almost away for a moment, then reflushing—a shifting, restless, unstable succession of soft opaline gleams, shimmering over that air film of white cloud, and turning it into a fabric dainty enough to clothe an angel with.

By and by we perceived what those super-delicate colors, and their continuous play and movement, reminded us of; it is what one sees in a soap-bubble that is drifting along, catching changes of tint from the objects it passes. A soap-bubble is the most beautiful thing, and the most exquisite, in nature; that lovely phantom fabric in the sky was suggestive of a soap-bubble split open, and spread out in the sun. I wonder how much it would take to buy a soap-bubble, if there was only one in the world? One could buy a hatful of Koh-i-Noors with the same money, no doubt.



We made the tramp from Martigny to Argentie`re in eight hours. We beat all the mules and wagons; we didn't usually do that. We hired a sort of open baggage-wagon for the trip down the valley to Chamonix, and then devoted an hour to dining. This gave the driver time to get drunk. He had a friend with him, and this friend also had had time to get drunk.

When we drove off, the driver said all the tourists had arrived and gone by while we were at dinner; "but," said he, impressively, "be not disturbed by that—remain tranquil—give yourselves no uneasiness—their dust rises far before us—rest you tranquil, leave all to me—I am the king of drivers. Behold!"

Down came his whip, and away we clattered. I never had such a shaking up in my life. The recent flooding rains had washed the road clear away in places, but we never stopped, we never slowed down for anything. We tore right along, over rocks, rubbish, gullies, open fields—sometimes with one or two wheels on the ground, but generally with none. Every now and then that calm, good-natured madman would bend a majestic look over his shoulder at us and say, "Ah, you perceive? It is as I have said—I am the king of drivers." Every time we just missed going to destruction, he would say, with tranquil happiness, "Enjoy it, gentlemen, it is very rare, it is very unusual—it is given to few to ride with the king of drivers—and observe, it is as I have said, I am he."



He spoke in French, and punctuated with hiccoughs. His friend was French, too, but spoke in German—using the same system of punctuation, however. The friend called himself the "Captain of Mont Blanc," and wanted us to make the ascent with him. He said he had made more ascents than any other man—forty seven—and his brother had made thirty-seven. His brother was the best guide in the world, except himself—but he, yes, observe him well—he was the "Captain of Mont Blanc"—that title belonged to none other.

The "king" was as good as his word—he overtook that long procession of tourists and went by it like a hurricane. The result was that we got choicer rooms at the hotel in Chamonix than we should have done if his majesty had been a slower artist—or rather, if he hadn't most providentially got drunk before he left Argentière.



[Previous Part](#) [Next Part](#)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A TRAMP ABROAD — VOLUME 06 ***

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