

A' o' a sudden she hears something rattling and slithering aboon her head, and before she can mak' the sign o' the cross bang comes the birzed corpse o' her intended at her feet, wi' ane o' the een knocked oot, and the nose crushed as flat as a flounder! In duty bound Ninagets mad as a March hare, and utters a string o' idiotical "ha! ha! ha's!" which occupy the three concluding lines o' the buik! Noo Crabtree, confess that I hae struck the richt nail on the head for ance?

MAJOR.—Indeed Laird, ingenious though your conjectures unquestionably are, you never were more off your eggs in the whole of your mundane curriculum! "The story of Mont Blanc" is neither more nor less than a collection of odds and ends relating to the snow-crowned mountain, —a large, and by far the most interesting portion of the work being occupied by the author's own adventures in reaching its climax.

LAIRD.—For my part I canna' understand what interest there can be in reading about a man speelin' a hill? I made the ascent o' Ben Lomond twice, and never thought o' writing a volume about my undertaking!

MAJOR.—Believe me, honest priest of Ceres, that the difference between your feat, and that accomplished by Mr. Smith, is as great as impaling an insect on a needle falls short, in epic importance, to the slaying of a mail-clad giant!

LAIRD.—I canna' see hoo that can be! Its nae joke reaching the tap o' auld Ben in the dog days I can tell you!

MAJOR.—Read the "Story" and you will confess that the annals of enterprise and danger contain few parallel cases to the one under consideration. The brain positively reels at times, when following the pilgrim through his frightful course. Fiction is rapid and tame when weighed against the stern realities of an ascent of Mont Blanc.—In justification of my dictum I will read you the account of the last upward stage made by our author.

The Mont Blanc guides are used to little varieties of temper, above the Grand Plateau. In spite of my mad determination to go to sleep, Balmat and another set me up on my legs again, and told me that if I did not exercise every caution, we should all be lost together, for the most really dangerous part of the whole ascent had arrived. I had the greatest difficulty in getting my wondering wits into order; but the risk called for the strongest mental effort; and, with just sense enough to see that our success in scaling this awful precipice was entirely dependent upon "pluck," I got ready for the climb. I have said the Mur de la Cote is some hundred feet high, and is an all but perpendicular iceberg. At one point you can reach it from the snow, but immediately after you begin to ascend it, obliquely,

there is nothing below but a chasm in the ice more frightful than anything yet passed. Should the foot slip, or the baton give way, there is no chance for life—you would glide like lightning from one frozen crag to another, and finally be dashed to pieces, hundreds and hundreds of feet below in the horrible depths of the glacier.—Were it in the valley, simply rising up from a glacier *a moraine*, its ascent would require great nerve and caution; but here, placed fourteen thousand feet above the level of the sea, terminating in an icy abyss so deep that the bottom is lost in obscurity; exposed in a highly rarified atmosphere, to a wind cold and violent beyond all conception; assailed, with muscular powers already taxed far beyond their strength, and nerves shaken by constantly increasing excitement and want of rest—with bloodshot eyes, and raging thirst, and a pulse leaping rather than beating—with all this, it may be imagined that the frightful Mur de la Côte calls for more than ordinary determination to mount it.

Of course every footstep had to be cut with the adzes; and my blood ran colder still as I saw the first guides creeping like flies upon its smooth glistening surface. The two Tairraz were in front of me, with the forepart of the rope, and François Favret I think, behind. I scarcely knew what our relative positions were, for we had not spoken much to one another for the last hour; every word was an exertion, and our attention was solely confined to our own progress. In spite of all my exertions, my confusion of ideas and extraordinary drowsiness increased to such a painful degree, that clinging to the hand-holes made in the ice, and surrounded by all this horror, I do believe, if we had halted on our climb for half a minute, I should have gone off asleep. But there was no pause. We kept progressing, very slowly indeed, but still going on—and up so steep a path, that I had to wait until the guide removed his foot, before I could put my hand into the notch. I looked down below two or three times, but was not at all giddy, although the depth lost itself in the blue haze.

For upwards of half an hour we kept on slowly mounting this iceberg, until we reached the foot of the last ascent—the *calotte*, as it is called—the "cap" of Mont Blanc. The danger was now over, but not the labor, for this dome of ice was difficult to mount. The axe was again in requisition; and everybody was so "blown," in common parlance, that we had to stop every three or four minutes. My young companions kept bravely on, like fine fellows as they were, getting ahead, even of some of the guides; but I was perfectly done up. Honest Tairraz had no sinecure to pull me after him, for I was tumbling about, as though completely intoxicated. I could not keep my eyes open, and planted my feet anywhere but in the right place. I know I was exceedingly cross. I have even a recollection of having scolded my "team," because they did not go quicker; and I was exceedingly indignant when one of them dared to call my attention to Monte Rosa. At last, one or two went in front, and thus somewhat quickened our progress. Gradually our speed increased, until I was scrambling almost on my hands and knees; and then, as I found myself on a level, it suddenly stopped. I looked round, and