

Although its summit is visible nearly a hundred miles away, no writer had deigned to mention it during all the preceding centuries. But though so long unrecognized, the "Monarch of the Alps" was well able to bide his time, and to disregard the conspiracy of silence into which it would almost seem that topographers, travellers, and the learned in general had entered with regard to him.

Public attention was first called to this district by two English travellers, Messrs. Windham and Pococke, who in 1741 paid a visit to the Valley of the Arve. They returned to Geneva to proclaim the marvels of the glacier Des Bois, the borders of which they had seen, and to which they had



ON THE MER DE GLACE.

given the name of the Mer de Glace, or "Sea of Ice." Strange to say, in the description which these first pioneers have left us there is not a word regarding the loftiest of the Alpine peaks.

In the following year, 1742, a new expedition set out, a party of Genevese, including a botanist and a geographical engineer named Pierre Martel. The latter was desirous of determining the position and elevation of several peaks. He mentions three of them, among the number being Mont Blanc, called also "La Montagne Maudite." "The Accursed Mountain," but did not attempt to scale its lofty height.

Another twenty years elapsed before travellers began to include this district in their itinerary. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, however, two citizens of Geneva, Marc Theodore Bourrit and Horace Benedict de Saussure, surnamed "The Homer of the Alps," both set their hearts with equal determination upon accomplishing the ascent of Mont Blanc. They offered a considerable reward to any one who would be their guide in this undertaking.

A young mountaineer of Chamounix, Jacques Balmat, was determined to be the first to conquer the mystery of Mont Blanc. He began by exploring the glaciers at its foot. Nature led him on and on to try and discover its secrets. The deep blue depths of the crevasse struck no terror into his heart. He gazed with fearless eyes and the courage of youth at all the marvels around him. To those of us who have followed in his steps the wonder is that he was brave enough to face the mountain solitudes alone.

With a wooden alpenstock and a guide's sack filled with provisions, he started when the stars were touching the great white dome. Whether the terror of the death-like stillness daunted him, or the insuperable difficulties of the route he had chosen, this first expedition ended in failure. A number of companions offered to accompany him. As far as the Grand Plateau all went well; then the courage of all save Balmat melted like the snow in summer, and they left the young mountaineer to continue his perilous journey alone.

Alone, with fields of dazzling snow on every side, and surrounded by crevasses of unknown depth, Balmat passed the night. In the darkness the thunder of the falling avalanches seemed doubly terrible. In graphic words he tells of the hours spent amid the snows which