

the ice afoot. We are soon upon the frozen mass that crawls down the gorge at the rate of perhaps, a few inches in twelve months. At any rate "it moves." It is said to be in many places a hundred feet thick. We can believe it, for here and there we look down into crevasses whose pale green walls reach the vanishing point before they reach the bottom. We can hear the rush of waters far below. Soon we are climbing over waves of ice, twenty to twenty-five feet high, by steps cut with an axe. Several times "my feet were almost gone," when my trusty guide seized my hand with a grip I shall never forget, it was like the clinch of a blacksmith's vice. It seemed as though that man's life was bound up in mine—if one perish, both must. Now I understand better the meaning of "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me," as I lean on my sharp pointed Alpenstock and feel myself drawn up by the strong hand above me. The warm-hearted fellow could not speak a word that I understood, but his face was eloquent, his eye as sharp as an eagle's, and his foot as sure as a chamois. In half an hour we reached the further shore of that strange sea. We had crossed the *Mers de Glace*. It is quite easy when you know how to do it. A little lower down, it assumes a much more turbulent shape, and is called the *Glacier des Bois*. There it must be utterly impassable. It is a gigantic rapid in ice, tumbling over an incline of 45°, or, rather, having the appearance that such a cascade would have if photographed instanter. We now commence the descent. The track has many ups and downs, over and among the debris of avalanches. Sometimes we are in a spray-bath from waterfalls a thousand feet high, at other points we see great boulders on the balance, ready on slightest provocation to fall and crush us to atoms. At length, the culminating point is reached—"The *Mauvais pas*." This is, in places, little more than very narrow steps cut in the face of perpendicular rock, with rods of iron let into it to hold on by. "Splendid view and recommended to ladies," says our guide-book, but what about old men? Certainly they have need to look only where to plant their feet at each successive step. Beyond this, a small auberge, called *The Chapeau*, invites us to rest, be refreshed and be thankful. We have descended a thousand feet

in an hour and three quarters. Here are the mules awaiting us, but a look at the steep zig-zag that leads to the valley is enough—better be foot-sore than run the risk of a broken neck. In due time our feet tread level ground again; and we are convinced that Mont-Blanc is every inch as high as it is said to be, and have no desire to approach any nearer to "the awful monarch." The valley of Chamoniix is twelve miles long and only about half a mile wide. It has a population of four thousand peasants, the majority of whom are very poor. The village is chiefly composed of hotels, for the accommodation of the 20,000 visitors who come here annually. In front of the R. C. Church, there is a rock-monument to the memory of Jacques Balmat, the first to ascend Mont Blanc, in 1786. The average number who make the ascent now is forty annually. It takes the best part of two days, costs \$50, and is never unattended with danger. The most terrible tragedy that ever occurred here took place on the 13th of September, 1870, when eleven persons, eight of them being guides and porters, perished near the summit, in a terrific snow-storm. One of the party was the Rev. George McCorkindale, of Gourock, "A man greatly beloved," to whose memory a stone has been erected in the churchyard, bearing the suggestive motto, "*Ubi crux, ibi patria*."

It is seven o'clock in the morning. The mountains are all veiled in mist. It rains heavily. The mules are at the door. The baggage is strapped on behind the saddles. Our departure from Chamoniix was like a miniature funeral procession,—two very sedate-looking pedestrians, and two mules, followed by the guide, in single file. At the first hill, we mount our drookit steeds and travel on slowly for some miles. Presently there is a rift in the clouds. Great banks of mist roll away in front of us; a patch of blue is seen overhead, then the sun shines upon us in all his glory. We make a long ascent over a splendid new road, and obtain magnificent views of mountain peaks and shining glaciers. We descend into a valley and on the level road make good time. Do you know the length of a Chamoniix mule's step? It is six feet, by careful measurement. His hind foot overlaps his front foot every time by twelve inches; to do this he must curl