

CHAPTER XI.

Uncle Job appeared surprised that with his very moderate experience he should thus have ventured alone in the heights.

"I thought you were wiser," said he, shaking his head; "but the mountain air is like wine; very few can drink moderately and without losing their reason. I ought to have remembered that the Hauser's blood ran in your veins. God pardon me! I hoped the hunting fever would only have won your cousin, for Hans was also on the heights."

"Have you seen him?" enquired Ulrich.

"Not him, but the mark of his steps; this morning I recognized them on the snow in pursuit of chamois tracks."

"Ah, that is the troop he was looking for," cried Ulrich. "The one he saw the day before yesterday led by an emperor."

"It is very possible; the tracks went northwards."

"To the foot of the Eiger?"

"No; there, nearer to us, on the right."

And Uncle Job's hand pointed towards one of the overhanging arches of the glacier that they had been following during the last few minutes, and by the side of which ran a kind of projecting ledge, notched and broken here and there. Below them the slope, at first jagged and roughly cut away, ended in a long sheltered space, like a band, where the melted snow had exposed to view a very fine patch of grass of that bluish tint peculiar to Alpine pasturages. It begirt the foot of the sterile peak like a ribbon of velvet, which, beginning there from the glacier, went on down and joined the skirts of the forest of fir and birch trees.

The young carver had stopped, his eyes were bent on the green corner, when suddenly he forced his companion to throw himself with him behind

one of the irregular rocks by which they were surrounded.

"What is the matter?" asked Job, instinctively lowering his voice.

"Look! look!" whispered Ulrich, "down there at the turning of the pasturage."

The old man shielded his eyes with his hand, and saw, in the direction pointed out, a troop of nine chamois turning the mountain, their emperor at their head. By their wild and frightened speed it was easy to guess they were being pursued, but for some time Uncle Job and Ulrich looked in vain around the foot of the peak for the hunter. At last, however, they both saw him on the projection which surmounted it, and they both recognized Hans.

While the chamois were rushing along the pasturage, Hans kept, so to speak, side by side with them on this ledge, trying to get in advance of them.

Uncle Job and Ulrich in terror watched him running along the narrowest strips and leaping the widest breaches, now hanging from some point of rock and crawling over the slippery surfaces. There seemed in his audacity such supreme contempt of the impossible that it made one giddy. Carried away in a sort of delirium, he went on as if he had been sovereign master of space, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, every sense fixed solely on his prey.

At length he succeeded in getting a little ahead of them, and in order more securely to stop the passage from the emperor leading them, he jumped on to an extreme point of rock, separated from the ledge.

Job seized his companion's hand, withholding the cry ready to escape, and not daring to do more. Hans had squatted himself on the narrow foot of earth that held him and taken aim.

At this moment the chamois were passing at his feet. The rifle was fired and the emperor fell. The hunter gave a cry of victory, which, in spite