

### THE AVALANCHE.

NAPOLEON'S TROOPS CROSSING THE ALPS.

A few days after Murat passed through, on the seventh December, 1813, a deluge of snow covered our mountains; there was more than ten feet on a level; we had to cut passages from house to house; and to add to our difficulties, a detachment of two hundred men, the wreck of one of those fine Italian regiments that were cut up at the battle of Hanau, had been detained on the Simplon for two days. Every one was full of the dread of avalanches, whether from the presentiment of the future, or the result of the experience of the old shepherds, who had long been regretting the stripping of the trees from our mountains, I cannot say. But I remember perfectly well the urgent entreaties of the gendarmes that I would not abandon them in case they should be buried under the avalanche; and more especially, the prophetic words of the brigadier, who at nine in the evening said sorrowfully, pointing to the snow, "There is our grave, we shall never see the light of day again!" And in fact, two hours afterwards, he was no more.

At eleven o'clock the officers, with whom the hotel was crowded, had retired to their rooms; when I entered a lower chamber in which the family of the postmaster was collected, preparing for their evening prayer.

"What do you think of the avalanche?" said the mistress of the house, anxiously.

"Don't be afraid," answered I, laughing. "I am here, and my time is not come yet; I will pray along with you that the ava—"

A tremendous noise cut the word short; it seemed as though the mountains were coming down on us; the outer walls of the room we were in began to crack and split, and I saw with deadly terror the trunk of an enormous larch, with some of its branches on, enter the room on the top of a mass of snow, which had carried every thing before it, walls, doors and partitions. My terror did not last long; the fainting of the women, the cries of the children, the alarm of the officers, who came to seek a shelter by us, half-naked with haggard eyes, and more than all, the danger that threatened the girl of my heart, left me no time to think of my fears: I rushed to the window, and burst it open, and then saw that the stables, opposite the house, had been crushed, and that the Roman tower was the only thing left standing on that side. My first care was to carry off to the tower the mother of my beloved. In a few minutes, I made a second trip with a second load, a lighter and a sweeter one, my Fanny. She had fainted; I left her with her mother, and hastened to where duty called me.

Meantime, all the inhabitants who had escaped from the wreck of their houses, had assembled, the curate in the midst, in his surplice, holding up the image of our Divine Redeemer; all kneeling in the snow, bare-headed, repeating in concert the terrible melody of the *Dies irae, dies illa*, which was accompanied by the far-off echoes of avalanches that were yet rolling through the valleys. The pale rays of the moon lighted up this scene, the most impressive I have ever witnessed, and one calculated to touch every heart.

"To the tocsin!" cried the hoarse voices of some hardy mountaineers.

"No, no, we are not safe," I answered; "do you want to bring down new avalanches by the sound of your bells?"

All understood me, and in spite of my extreme youth came, with tools in hand, to obey my orders. My first object was to disengage the brigade of *douaniers*, who had passed the night at the *corps-de-gardes*, as I had ordered. The doors and windows were covered under more than ten feet of snow. It was less from *esprit-de-corps* that I begun with them, than from the efficient aid I should obtain from these hardy fellows. As soon as the first duty was over, I looked round for the barack of the *gendarmerie*: it had disappeared, all except the corner farthest from the road; at that angle there was a window in which a light was still shining. It was the brigadier's quarters, and I began to feel a hope of saving him. Accompanied by one of my men, I crept on my hands and knees to the spot where we saw the light, and climbed with great labour up the remains of a staircase, which gave us access to the apartment. On entering by the half-opened door, to our great surprise we saw nothing of the brigadier or his wife; we called them repeatedly, but in vain. No one answered, except that our shouts aroused two lovely little girls, who were sleeping in the same bed, and who, it seemed, had not been awakened either by the roar of the avalanche, nor the destruction of a part of the building. The innocent darlings, used to being caressed by me, stretched out their arms, calling for *papa*. We wrapped them up carefully, and with great labour succeeded in depositing them in the tower.

What was the fate of their parents? We did not ascertain until the next day, when we found their bodies, horribly mutilated, under the ruins of the barrack.

During our absence, a road had been opened to the stables of the post-office, where were heard the groans of postilions, and the violent efforts of their horses, struggling against their fate. After some hours labour, we succeeded in disinterring a young postilion, named Seiler. It was high time, for his eyes were filled with blood and he was on the very point of suffocation. One of his fellows who slept in the same bed, was less fortunate. He had his time to cry out "Oh God, what is this?" before he was a corpse. Three or four others perished in the stable.

Day overtook us in the midst of our arduous task; we were fairly worn out with fatigue, and the barracks seemed so completely destroyed, that we had almost given up the idea of further search in that quarter, when a loud shout informed us that some fellow creature required our aid. The signal came from one of my brave fellows, Rambaud, who had laid his ear to the snow, and thus been able to hear a faint moaning. As soon as his discovery was made known, the workmen laboured with new zeal, but at every stroke they ran a risk of crushing the sufferers under the ruins that fell around us. This forced us to proceed with great caution; but Rambaud had the presence of mind to open with the spade a kind of narrow shaft, and was let down by a rope at the risk of being crushed to death among the ruins.

We did not succeed in communicating with the victims till eleven in the morning; my name uttered by one of them was the first sound that reached us. Two of the gendarmes, Curtz and Laroo, who had been squeezed in between the wreck of the walls, were the only ones left alive, and even they were not yet in safety. We had already dragged from under the ruins the mangled corpses of the brigadier and his wife, and one of his men; after tremendous exertions we succeeded in disengaging Curtz and Laroo. Both were severely wounded, Curtz in particular had his head compressed by a heavy brick stove, and survived his deliverance only twenty-four hours. It seemed that the brigadier and his wife, in their terror, had repaired to the quarters of their men, and there met a fate that did not visit the apartments they left.

The unhappy sufferers had been buried under the snow twenty-six hours, yet when we questioned them they said they did not think it was three. "We trusted so much to you!" said poor Curtz, grasping my hand.

The avalanche came down from the Pahaolz mountains, and forced through the forest that bears the same name; huge larches such as four men could not span, were crushed down by it, like straws. It destroyed the gendarmes' barracks, the forge, the public building, then seemed to diverge, and after shaking and partly overthrowing the post station had broken at the base of the Roman tower, after shoving the stables clean off the ground.

I will not speak of the unexampled fatigue and cold we had to endure, these were the least part; we were lucky in being so many, for if one of us, worn out with toil and watching, threw himself on the snow, whence he would have waked only in eternity, the rest would rub his limbs, even beat him, and force him to keep on. How many poor straggling soldiers we saw who had perished in that way! they were generally seated holding their firelocks; on their ruddy countenances we could still trace the smile that accompanies death by cold. When we reached the convent a still more melancholy spectacle waited us; Colonel Pesta, of the first Italian regiment, and part of his staff, had perished in an avalanche, and their bodies had just been brought in. Poor Colonel! his aged mother was waiting for him at the foot of the Simplon; she fancied that she soon was to clasp in her arms the darling son, whom the snows of Russia had spared; he knew it, and in spite of the advice of the mountaineers, determined to push on. His filial piety was the cause of his death at twenty-five.

The next day we arrived at Brigg, and I went on to Sion, to make my report to the prefect. I did not imagine, however, that I would appear in the character of a visiter from the other world; but so it proved. I was introduced at midnight, and my haggard features, which the sufferings I had undergone had rendered livid, and on which my guide's lantern shed a dim light, made the good people take me for a spectre. They seemed fairly panic struck, and it was some time before I could explain that the report of my death which had reached them was decidedly premature. The prefect was pleased to award us very high praise; but it can be easily imagined that the great events which happened soon after, caused our humble services to be forgotten. Not that I would complain of this, the only adequate reward of such labours is in the consciousness of having done our duty.—Translated for the *New York Mirror*.

### THE UNKNOWN.

"He passed—nor of his land or race  
Hath left a token or a trace—  
This broken tale was all we knew!"

Byron.

It was late in the autumn, and Geneva, which had been crowded with strangers of various nations, amongst whom, as usual, the number of English by far predominated, was now nearly deserted by its flying visitants, who passed on their way to Florence, Rome, or Vienna; the mountains were no longer people, with many coloured bonnets, and well-made coats; nor every point of view infested with lionizers and sketchers, a few, however, still lingered, and some of them intended to pass the winter there. I was of the latter number, for I was an invalid, and had been recommended.

"To breathe abroad the mountain air,  
Fresh from the vigorous north."

And I was amazed by watching the endless diversity of that thing called "society," which, like the forms in a kaleidoscope, is continually changing its new tints and combinations. As our circle became smaller, the love of talking of our neighbors' affairs seemed to increase, curiosity grew more keen as the means of gratifying it diminished, and arrivals, departures, and flirtations, rose to double value in public estimation. Accordingly I found myself watching with considerable interest, the approach of a handsome travelling carriage, which drove up to the door of the hotel, at the window of which I was sitting, with a book in my hand which I was supposed to be reading. It was a large *berline*, of foreign build, without arms, crest, or cypher—a whiskered courier, a smart ladies maid, and the usual complement of handboxes, crowned the outside; while from within, there descended, first, a young man so muffled up in a fur cloak and travelling cap, that nothing but his nose was visible; and then a lady, whose close bonnet and veil completely prevented me from catching even a glimpse of her features. This form the fur cloak and travelling cap assisted to alight with great care, almost carrying it from the carriage into the hotel. After them, a fat nurse, holding an infant in her arms, followed with great precaution and deliberation, and disappeared into the house. I put on my hat and wandered out to take my usual *promenade de nuit*. As I was returning home, I met the new arrivals just issuing forth to enjoy the calm, pure evening air. The young man was of the middle size, slender, dark, and pale; but the lady soon engrossed my whole attention; she was, I think, one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld; her beauty was of that sort which it is impossible to class as belonging to any particular country. This much only I was certain of, that in whatever land she had been born, she was of the first rank of society in it. These handsome strangers were the objects of much inquiry; but very little could be discovered. The whiskered courier, and the smart ladies-maid set off for Paris the very next day; and when they were asked who their master and mistress were, they replied, they knew nothing about them; they had been hired in Paris to attend them to Geneva; that the gentleman was called in the passport, Monseigneur le Baron de Clairville, and the lady Madame la Baron; and this was all they knew. It was no use applying to the fat nurse, for she was a Swiss, and engaged by them after their arrival in the country; they continued to reside in the most fashionable, and consequently the dearest hotel in Geneva, without any apparent wish of avoiding expense in their way of life. They received no communications from without—and; except to take their evening walk, never left their apartments.

The Baron took several journeys, the longest of which did not last more than four days, when he returned, the delight he apparently felt at seeing his wife, seemed to restore all his cheerfulness, but on the morrow he relapsed into melancholy, nor was the baroness more free from it, though she succeeded better in concealing it; more than once I surprised her in so profound a reverie, that she did not hear me open the door; and one day in particular, during the absence of the baron, I perceived her, as I entered the apartment, seated at a table, one hand supporting her head, and the other holding something which was gazed on with mournful intensity, that seemed to call up the visible forms of those, whoever they were, which that record presented to her mind. Her cheek was pale as marble and her brow contracted like one in pain, but who was determined to endure with firmness.

She started when she saw me, and affecting to stoop over her child, who was seated on the sofa near her, arranged the cushions round him; and when she looked up to welcome me, she had nothing in her hand but the embroidery.

That she might not suppose I had observed her agitation, I gaily assured her that I was so much absorbed in admiration of her son as to have neither eyes nor ears for any one else. She tried to