

At daybreak he resumed his explorations of the mountain. It was thus that he discovered the proper direction in which to climb the "soveran peak"—namely, by following up the valley of snow which stretches from the point now known as the *Grands Mulets*, and ascending from thence to Mont Blanc by a moderately steep acclivity. The bad weather, snow, excessive cold, and want of provisions prevented Jacques Balmat from pushing forward to the goal; but, in redescending the valley, he ascertained with exactitude the actual course to be pursued in order to gain the summit.

On returning home, Jacques Balmat slept for eight-and-forty hours without once awaking.

The incessant refraction of the sun's rays upon the snow had so fatigued his sight, that he suffered severely from diseased eyes. A physician, named Paccard, who resided in Chamounix village, relieved him from the ophthalmia. In gratitude for his cure and acknowledgment of his skill, Balmat revealed to him his great discovery, and proposed to him to share the glory of accomplishing the First Ascent of Mont Blanc. Dr. Paccard accepted the proposal joyfully.

On the 8th of August 1786 the two adventurers commenced their daring expedition. They had only confided to two persons the secret of their project before carrying it into execution. So they accomplished alone this lengthened and dangerous route, which our Alpine climbers now-a-days do not attempt except with a numerous and well-provided escort. All their stores consisted of a couple of woollen coverlets, in which to wrap themselves at night under the shadow of some projecting rock. It is difficult to understand how these two men, reduced to their own resources, in the midst of these desolate wastes, these ice-bound deserts, which had never before been trodden by human foot, could reach the goal they had proposed to themselves, in spite of the snows and the precipices, the cold, and the rarefaction of the atmosphere. But it is certain that, after passing the night under a rock on the plateau of the *Grands Mulets*, they ascended, on the following day, to the "monarch of mountains."

The inhabitants of Chamounix, meanwhile, had assembled in crowds, and, by means of their telescopes, could perceive the two heroes on the topmost peak of Mont Blanc—that is, of the loftiest mountain in Europe, which had hitherto been considered utterly inaccessible to man.

Jacques Balmat and Paccard remained for half an hour on the horse-shoe ridge which forms the actual summit.

But, owing to the continual reflection and dazzling gleam of the sunlit snows, Paccard, when he regained the valley, was almost blind; while Balmat's face was swollen, his lips were congested with blood, and his eyes were sorely fatigued.

"It is strange," said Paccard to his companion next morning; "I hear the birds sing, and it is not day!"

"That is because you cannot see," replied Balmat; "the sun has risen, but the swelling of your eyelids renders you temporarily blind."

Happily, this accident had no fatal consequences. Dr. Paccard died in 1830, at the ripe age of seventy-nine. As for Jacques Balmat, he perished miserably, in 1834, at the bottom of a precipice. Some vague rumours had induced him to