

believe that a vein of gold existed on the flank of one of the lofty peaks which shut in the valley of the Sixt on the north-east, and he started in search of it. But the place indicated proved inaccessible; it was necessary to advance along a narrow cornice, beneath which descended, sheer and sombre, into the abyss a precipice nearly 400 feet in depth. The sight froze his blood with terror. But some time afterwards, accompanied by a chamois hunter, as rash and as intrepid as himself, he renewed the attempt. He ventured on the narrow cornice—a few steps—and he disappeared in the abyss! His body was never found.*

But this is a digression.



FIG. 54.—ROCK OF THE GRANDS MULETS. (*After a Photograph by Tairraz.*)

As soon as he had recovered from his fatigue—that is, in about four days after his successful ascent—Jacques Balmat betook himself to Geneva, to announce to De Saussure the result of his expedition. De Saussure had already been informed of it, and wished, without a moment's needless delay, to follow in the footsteps of the mountaineer.

On the 20th of August 1786, Jacques Balmat attempted, in company with De Saussure, the grand and extraordinary enterprise which he had accomplished with Dr. Paccard. They passed the night in a cave above the Glacier de Tacconay. But

* Michel Carrier, "Notice Biographique sur Jacques Balmat" (Geneva, 1854, 8vo edition).