

shouted the names of the missing guides ; but at so immense an elevation the rarefied air produced but feeble sounds.

Presuming that they were buried under a thick stratum of snow, Hamel thrust in his staff to its entire length, and stretching himself on the surface, he held the staff firmly with his teeth ; then he listened with profound attention. But there came no answer ; nothing troubled the silence of that lugubrious sepulchre.

They were compelled to discontinue the fruitless search. Dr. Hamel and his companion returned to the plateau. The unfortunate guides were lying at least 150 feet deep in the snow. There was no resource but to abandon them, and, since that epoch, no tourist who makes the ascent of Mont Blanc can pass without a throbbing heart the abyss of ice where perished so miserably the three inhabitants of the valley.

As the day advanced the cold became icy ; for at that elevation our travellers had nearly attained the height of Mont Blanc itself. They had spent two hours in fruitless search on the borders of the great crevasse ; it was absolutely necessary they should begin the descent, if they did not wish to be overtaken by night and darkness in the midst of the precipices, and incur the hazard of being frozen to death.

The guide Mathieu Balmat then drew near to Dr. Hamel, and looking him full in the face, even as the doctor had confronted him on the morning of that fatal day,—

“ Well, sir,” he exclaimed, “ are we *cowards* ; and will you still ascend ? ”

The doctor replied by giving the signal of return. He would fain have persuaded some of the guides to pass the night on the edge of the crevasse, and there await the succour which was hastening up from Chamounix. It was, perhaps, to doom them to death. The suggestion, therefore, was received by the guides with indignant remonstrances, and they reproached the foreigner with having caused by his obstinacy the death of their comrades.

On their homeward route each related the sensations he had