An Alpine Adventure.

We were sitting on the broad piazza of the Hôtel des Voyageurs at Chamouni. The afternoon sun was slowly sinking into a mass of clouds that lined the horizon and gave promise of a glorious sunset. At this moment, however, our eyes were turned upon the mountains which towered above us, their peaks and pinnacles seeming to pierce the heavens, and their long slopes, clad in the eternal snows, shining dazzingly white against the dark-blue background of the sky. Far away over the intervening heights the summit of Mont Blanc appeared in all its strength and majesty, while about it, yet far enough away not to seem to trespass on its dignity, the lower summits clustered like kneeling princes around their sovereign.

My companion, an old Alpine traveller, who had for many a summer haunted the peaks and vales of Switzerland and the Tyrol, and who was familiar with every legend and story of adventure which hung about the beetling cliffs and grim crevasses, drew my attention to the black line of a chasm which stood out sharply on the white side of the Aiguille du Midi.

"Do you see that dark line up there, at the foot of that steep slope?" said he. "Well, there is a story connected with that crevasse and slope which may be worth your hearing!"; and, tilting back his chair, he fixed his eyes on the line of the chasm and related this story, which I will give you in his words as near as I can remember them:

"It was a number of years ago, before mountain climbing had come much into fashion, and an ascent of that old white head over there"—nodding toward Mont Blanc—"was regarded as something worthy of special mention, not an every-day occurrence, as it is now fast becoming. It was the time of my first visit to the Alps, and I had come fresh from America, with the true, spread-eagle ideas of a native Yankee concerning the superiority of his country in all things, and especially in regard to natural advantages and mountain scenery. I had climbed all the peaks of note in the Eastern States, and had been up many of the Rockies and Nevadas, and I felt myself competent to walk up any little twopenny Swiss mountain, ice or no ice, guides or no guides. I had even conceived the idea of smuggling up a sled, and, starting at the top, I would come down in a style which should excite the admiration of timorous guides and plodding Englishmen. Mind, I was not much more than a boy, and my enthusiasm and confidence in my own powers were things extraordinary.

"On the afternoon of my arrival here I started to make up a party to climb Mont Blanc the following day, for I intended to beard the lion at the first opportunity and conquer the highest mountain at once. Greatly to my disgust I could find no guides who, by any inducements, could be persuaded to start the next morning. No, the weather outlook was somewhat unpropitious, and nothing would move them. Such was my chagrin at my failure that I should probably have started out alone had not my friends restrained me almost by main force. To climb some mountain that next day I was determined, and at last, not without misgivings, my friends organized a party to ascend the Pic du Midi, on whose side that crevasse lies.

"The path, or rather the way of ascent, — for there is no path, as all traces of a climbing party are speedily lost in the drifting snow, — run from the Glacier de Bosson over a series of lower shoulders and wound around to the farther side of the mountain, finally passing over that sharp ridge which stands against the sky above the crevasse. Starting early in the morning, we experienced no great difficulty in crossing the ice fields and climbing the slippery slopes, though once or twice we found it necessary to bridge some yawning opening with our ladders, or cross on a frail snow-bridge, that looked as if it might give way at any moment. Only on these occasions had the ropes been used; but as we were about to begin the steep climb along the ridge, word was passed to join in line and make ourselves fast with the ropes.

"The excitement of the ascent had set my blood to boiling, and the idea of being tied to the rope I haughtily disdained. My companions protested, and threatened to give up the climb if I would not allow myself to be joined to them. The guides shrugged their shoulders at my rashness, and pointed out the dangers I must encounter and the terrible death that awaited a slip or misstep. All to no purpose; it was my intention to climb a snow-clad by my own unaided efforts; and climb I would, though the whole company should go back and leave me to go alone.

"I don't defend my recklessness; it was a boy's foolhardiness and love of danger, of which I was well cured before the day was over. At last, finding all protestations unavailing, the party started up, leaving one guide to have special charge of me. We had not gone far up the dizzy cliff,—for the beginning was an almost perpendicular wall of ice, in which each step had to be cut with the ice-axe,—before I would have been glad to have had the rope's assistance. Pride, however, held me firm; and I would rather have perished than have asked for help or appeared in any way to need it. Safely we reached the top of the cliff, and then began a long, toilsome ascent upon the narrow ridge which led up to the summit.

"On this side you can see how the slope from the ridge runs down almost precipitously to the crevasse, and on the other side of the ridge it is even steeper, a clear slide for many thousand feet, ending in a sheer fall into the valley below. The top is only a few feet wide and in places narrows to a few inches. This side, you see, is broken by the line of the crevasse, which lies half-way down toward the glacier. This