Stranger Than Fact: The Climber in Fiction

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"But you, too, have climbed," Chayne cried at length.
"On winter nights by my fireside," replied Garratt Skinner with a smile.
"I have a game leg which would hinder me."
—(The alibi of Gabriel Strood) *Running Water.*

THE painted ladies of Toulouse-Lautrec in a vanished day wore long black gloves and were pointedly snubbed by that portion of the feminine world which prided itself on its moral tone. Nevertheless they set a style. Covert glances, appraising and envious, sought them out in exhibition halls and art dealers' windows, and the influence they exerted was evident in the piled-up hair, the pallid masks and seductively shadowed eyes of many a woman of fashion and superior virtue.

The mountaineer of fiction, another glamorous half-worldling, has likewise been accorded the flattery of imitation. He is sometimes seen on the lecture platform, subtly choosing adjectives which emphasize while seeming to minimize the perils of his sport, and we readily discern his secret admiration for the dashing hero of *High Hazard, A Romance of the Alps.* Let the truth be told: it is an admiration not untouched with envy that most of us share.

Our predecessors of half a century ago posed with axe and rope before the photographers of Chamonix and Interlaken, and, because there is a touch of Tartarin in us, we can regret the lost beards, the large-checked Norfolk suits, the deer-stalker caps, and the property rocks on which the right foot was placed in attitude of conquest. Did the unknown dangers of pioneering above treeline produce those expressions of daring and dedication, or were they perhaps suggested by perusal of the latest Alpine thriller, bought at the Kiosk of Victoria Station for 2/6? Here again, we suspect, life took its cue from art.

Fortunately, so far as we know, this emulation was never carried to its ultimate conclusion. It is only in fiction that the Brenva face of Mont Blanc has been the scene of an attempted murder; or that a deceived husband has sent his wife's lover to an icy death in the depths of a crevasse. An ice-axe, to be sure, purchased for an alleged ascent of Popocatapetl, bashed to eternity the late and un-

lamented Trotsky, but, while this incident took place at 7000 ft., it cannot be rated an Alpine crime, for its setting was the interior of a town house and not a mountain hut.

Once in our youth, crossing a glacier in the morning dusk and passing a particularly sinister *moulin,* we were momentarily alarmed by the muttered comment of our bearded guide: "A fine place to get rid of a body!" We have shrunk from the edge of such evil holes ever since, although none, to our knowledge, has yet yielded a *bona fide* corpse. For colorful character in crimes committed above the snowline there is nothing to equal those ascribed to the characters of mountaineering fiction.

Were we to deal fully with the rôle of the Alps in imaginative literature, our task would indeed be long and difficult. We should then begin our survey with *Theuerdank* (1517), a narrative poem which must be rated the first mountain melodrama, for its hero, Emperor Maximilian I, is subjected to many trials not of Nature's contriving. Rocks are hurled at him, he is lured to slippery ledges, led below falling chamois and into the path of avalanches. But he survives, aided in no small part by a climbing technique that even today would be thought conservative. The adventure on the Martinswand was the only one which ever caught him spread-eagled, and then an angel conveniently came along and led him down. It was even then an old angle to allow a hero the special protection of the supernatural. His scrambling was not limited to the hillside, for Charlotte Yonge, in *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* (1866), recounts his ascent of the cathedral spire at Ulm: Kaiser Max, the first human fly.

No, much more must be left out of our casual survey than can be included in it: narrative verse, the drama, the whole range of prose fiction in which the mountains serve merely as a background. Here we are sorely tempted, for the great novelists from Rousseau and Scott to Proust and Mann, and lesser writers by the score, have adorned their works with countless passages in which the mountain scene and the feeling which it inspires are memorably described. "The little hills rejoice on every side," writes Susan Glaspell in *The Morning is Near Us* (1940). "They didn't come in too close, and they were so friendly. As a child she had loved the shadows sliding downhill and the first gleam of morning sun on the crest had always made her want to clap her hands. . . . The hills were fun and they were company and they were beautiful."

It is one of many fine passages that come to mind as an example of all the good things that must be set aside.

How difficult this makes it! We cannot easily pass by Florian's *Claudine,* based on the story of the seduced flower-girl of the Montanvert, which François Paccard related to the author at Chamonix in 1788. Nor do we wish to overlook the anonymous *Peasants of Chamouni* (1823), with its account of the Hamel accident on Mt. Blanc which so influenced the childhood of Albert Smith. We should at least record Longfellow's *Hyperion* (1839) as the first American novel in Alpine setting. We turn aside with difficulty from Albert Smith's *Christopher Tadpole* (1848), which includes Mrs. Hamper's terrific ascent to the Grands Mulets, and can but mention *Impressions de Voyage* (1833) by the elder Dumas, which gave Chamonix its first free advertising and assuredly rates as fiction in the chapter "Jacques Balmat dit Mont Blanc."

Much more appropriate to our survey are the modern novels of our fellow-climber John Buchan. Yet, while Leithen and Hannay were climbers whose adventures often befell them in regions of rock and ice, most of Buchan's references to mountains and ascents are incidental. His description of the Coolins in *Mr. Standfast* (1939) strikes the right note: "Mountains have always been a craze of mine, and the blackness and mystery of those grim peaks went to my head. . . . I began to have a queer instinct that that was the place, that something might be concealed there, something pretty damnable." But this is not a climbing novel, nor is the posthumous *Mountain Meadow* (1940) from which we cite his description of a fall from an arctic cliff: "He and the weight of the baggage, plucked Leithen from his stance. . . . Once, climbing at Courmayeur alone he [Leithen] had slipped in a snowfield and been whirled to what he believed to be his end in a bergschrund (which happened to be nearly full of snow) into which he had disappeared comfortably. Now once again, before his senses left him, he had the same certainty of death and the same apathy."

Howard Swiggett's long and obscure introduction to *Mountain Meadow* contains a further reference to a climbing incident in one of Buchan's early stories ("Space," in *The Moon Endureth*): ". . . . we first meet Edward Leithen . . . . telling a story to an ignoramus on a Scotch hill. It was a story of a mathematical genius named Hollond who had stumbled on a theory of corridors in space constantly shifting according to inexorable laws. The mathematics

of the idea gradually filled him with a sort of dynamic horror and he went out to Chamonix and died at the Grépon, apparently after having gone up the Mummery crack by himself."

Buchan's novels, distinguished as they were in style, were none the less thrillers, and it is to this class that most of mountaineering fiction belongs. Reviewing James Ramsey Ullman's *High Conquest* in a recent issue of the *New Yorker,* Clifton Fadiman remarked of mountaineering that it is "the only sport that has produced not merely a literature but literature." One wonders how much of it Mr. Fadiman can have read. It seems likely that his attention was confined to factual accounts of climbing—to books like Stephen's *The Playground of Europe* and Mummery's *My Climbs in the Alps and the Caucasus*—for many of these have a distinction that merits such praise. We doubt, however, that he would certify as literature that small body of fiction dealing with the exploits of climbers which has as its acknowledged masterpiece A. E. W. Mason's *Running Water* (1907).

Until the appearance of this novel, the Alpine Journal had paid scarcely any attention to mountaineering fiction. A note of comment might accompany the title listed among recent accessions to the club library, but *Running Water* was the first mystery story to be granted the distinction of a review, and a surprisingly tolerant one it was for such an austere publication, which seldom spared the feelings of writers even though they happened to be members of the club. For this reason it is worth quoting: "The ingenious author of the 'Four Feathers' has given the public a story which is a mixture of climbing and crime. Never before surely has a heroine been introduced reading a back volume of the 'Alpine Journal.' Never before, we think, has a 'first-class climb' been made the mainspring of a romance—although 'imaginary climbs' may have been a conspicuous feature in some recent works of travel. Mr. Mason knows something of the business, and writes as we should expect of peaks and passes, of rock-faces and ice-slopes. He writes also as a true lover of the glories of the heights, and his vivid descriptions will attract many readers who do not care for the nefarious schemes of the low society from which he draws his heroine, only in order to place her on an Alpine pedestal. Her father is described as a climber . . . . whose favorite work was 'The Alps in 1864.' . . . We confess—since he turns out to be also an ex-convict and a would-be murderer—to some feeling of relief

on finding that in other respects he is distinguishable from an ex-president of the Alpine Club. . . . We are not going to give away the story. It is enough to say that there is a fatal accident on the Col des Nantillons, an admirably described ascent of the Aiguille d'Argentière, which decides the fate of the hero and heroine, and an ineffectual but thrilling attempt at homicide on the Brenva side of Mont Blanc. What can the reader ask for more?"

Facing page 92 of the book is the portrait of Sylvia, the heroine, as "she stood upon the narrow ridge of snow." Mont Blanc rises in the background. She is as beautiful as a Gibson girl and as shapely, and the two gentlemen who stand behind and slightly below her have their eyes riveted on the most expansive of her delectable curves. Her costume was unquestionably created by Burberry, as may be confirmed by reference to contemporary advertisements in Whymper's guidebooks, and she holds an ice-axe with the precise interlocking grip of a champion golfer. "The fascination of the mountains was on her. Something new had come into her life that morning which would never fail her to the very end, which would color all her days, however dull, which would give her memories in which to find solace, longings wherewith to plan the future." The climber's mate *par excellence*.

Mountaineering is presented in other of Mason's novels and tales. The accident by which Mr. Arkwright met his death in the Oberland is duplicated on Scafell in *A Romance of Wastdale* (1895), but tragic implications are lacking in this case, for the victim is the villain and the reader is not sorry to see him disposed of. The Alpine character of "The Guide," a short story in *The Odd Volume* (1908) is attested by its title.

There is a hierarchy even among authors of crime stories. Measured by the side of many of his contemporaries, in the early days of the century, Mason was a master of plot and style. The Alpine Journal practically ignored productions similar to *Running Water* by writers of lesser gifts.[1] Annie French Hector, who wrote under the pseudonym of "Mrs. Alexander," produced a three-volume novel called *A Second Life* (1885), in which, we are told, "The heroine with the connivance of a guide, leads people to suppose that she has been killed by falling into a

[1] We are indebted to Mr. F. Oughton for supplying the plot outlines of a number of works of fiction in the library of the Alpine Club.

crevasse on the Mer de Glace. This is her way of getting a separation from a hated husband." An equally brief note informs us that the hero of William Westall's *Her Two Millions* (1887) disposed of his wife by thrusting her into a crevasse on Mont Blanc; while a somewhat longer reference to Constance Sutcliffe's *Our Lady of the Ice* (1901) begins as follows: "The hero is a guide who fails to rescue his English Herr from a crevasse, but later dies in the attempt to save the Herr's brother." This is probably the first novel in English having for its leading motive a question in the morals of mountaineering. The moral issue is likewise to the fore in Beatrice Harraden's *Out of the Wreck I Rise* (1912), in which a swindler escapes from the difficulties in which his illegal practices have involved him by thrusting himself in the path of an avalanche, and in Henri Bordeaux's *Footprints in the Snow* (1913), a translation from the French. Here the lover of the heroine, a married woman, dies in a fall from the Vélan.

An infernal machine is introduced in Gertrude Warden's *The Crime in the Alps* (1908), an aneroid barometer being arranged to explode when the victim attained an elevation of 5000 ft., a sinister relative being after the hero's money. A spiritualistic tale is *The Thirty Days* (1915) by Hubert Wales. During an ascent of Mont Blanc by a party of three, two business partners and the wife of one of them, the husband dies and his soul enters another body.

In recent times *Running Water* has had worthy successors. One at least of Dorothy Sayers' masterly mystery novels, *The Five Red Herrings* (1931), combines crime and climbing against a Scottish background. In *Sinister Crag* (1939) Newton Gale assembles a crew of rogues in a Lake Country tavern.

Better mountaineering stories than any thus far mentioned have, fortunately, been written. In Arnold Lunn's *Family Name* (1931) Claude loves Pamela but knows that he "must marry some female with pots of money" in order to recoup the family fortunes. He becomes engaged to a lady with the necessary financial qualifications, is bored because she dislikes mountaineering, and finds release when in an unguarded moment he slips off the Lauteraarhorn. The climbing episodes are as well done as any in the range of fiction, but the book is equally interesting for its exposition of the author's original views of society and the world.

Joanna Cannan's *Ithuriel's Hour* (1931) is a psychological thriller with a streamlined plot. Sir Clement Vyse, he-man and martinet, is agreeably surprised when his son David, near-sighted and quite uninterested in sport, develops a taste for mountaineering. Chowo-Kangri (27,000 ft.) is the goal of their expedition, which includes John Ullathorne as leader of the climbing party. Pamela, wife of Ullathorne, attracts Sir Clement, a fact of which her husband is unpleasantly aware, and the party leaves for India in a quarrelsome mood. Within sight of the summit, one of the climbers falls ill and Sir Clement is ordered by Ullathorne to see the sick man back to camp. Sir Clement, to whom conquest is everything, refuses and pushes the now unroped Ullathorne over a precipice before going on alone to the highest point. The cause of this tragedy lives only long enough to tell David what had happened. David accuses his father of the crime, but the accusation is thought incredible by everyone, and on the party's return to England, Pamela agrees to marry Sir Clement. We have our last sight of David reading the employment ads in the *Daily Telegraph,* with nineteen shillings to his name. The plot is competently devised, and the technical details, from chlorate of potash to pitons, are handled with skill, but the characters are ill-assorted and unconvincing.

A Freudian note is sounded in Anne Strawbridge's *Above the Rainbow* (1938), the story of Hannah, who should have been Edward, her father's son and not his daughter. The handling of mountaineering episodes in this as well as in the same author's earlier *Dawn After Danger* (1934) is unexceptionable, but it is difficult, as in the case of Miss Cannan's work, to believe in her characters. Ruthven Todd's *Over the Mountain* (1939) is an allegory of fascism, the tale of a youth whose ambition it is to climb "The Peak," a virgin summit beyond which lies an unknown land, an ambition in which he succeeds after incredible hardship.

Thus we see that the plots of mountaineering fiction are based on adventure in high country, with the addition of varying amounts of romance, mystery, crime and detection. The convincing quality of any story being dependent upon the accuracy of the author's observation, it is evident in many instances that the narrator has been no nearer Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn than the telescopes of Chamonix and Zermatt—which is merely another way of saying

that not every novelist has had practical experience in climbing.[2]

This lack of authentic background was once amusingly summed up[3] by the late A. D. Godley (A. C.), as follows: "Fiction habitually presents Alpine adventure in a singular unattractive aspect: the incidents described are seldom such as the man in the train would wish to see reproduced in his own daily life; neither heroes nor villains appear to him to offer models for his imitation. You know the kind of thing. The hero and the villain—both, I regret to say, described as members of this Club—go out to pluck for the lady who ensnares their rival affections—the price of Alpine adventure—the edelweiss, which, as is well known, blooms only on the least accessible of the snow-clad summits. In pursuit of this coveted vegetable, the hero inevitably slips into a bergschrund; his companion sees the opportunity for disposing of a hated rival, and cuts the rope. But kindly Nature defeats the machinations of the villain; for the glacier, sweeping swiftly and steadily downward, takes charge of the fallen mountaineer, and duly delivers him safe and sound in the valley, just in time to prevent the villain from leading the heroine to the hymeneal altar. Such narratives are seldom founded on actual experience and knowledge, but the public does not know that."

Space will permit mention of but two short stories. In the title piece of C. E. Montague's *Action* (1928) a brave man, who has more than his share of troubles in the post-war world, is threatened by impending hemiplegia and decides to return to his beloved mountains and allow his life to end in a solitary attempt on an overhanging ice cliff. As he is about to fall, an ice-axe shoots past from above and he realizes that another party on the mountain is in distress. This drives him to find a way out of his own hazardous situation, and to rescue a couple who would otherwise have perished. Later conversation leads him to the conviction that life is still worth living, but the effect on his blood pressure is not stated.

In *Macmillan's Magazine* for August, 1902, and signed only with the initials O. M. is a grimly powerful tale of unusual angle, called "The Madness of the Mountains." The heroine has a horror of mountaineering, because of possible accidents, and "for fifteen years she has tried by faith and prayer to remove mountains, and

[2] The membership of the Alpine Club (London) has included Albert Smith, A. E. W. Mason, C. E. Montague, John Buchan and Arnold Lunn.

[3] *A. J. 37* (1925), 114.

she has always failed." The mountains had always been her foes; she hated them fiercely, as strongly as her husband and her child had loved them. The son starts off for a climb, and his mother, leaning from a window to dissuade him, overbalances and falls to her death.

This is perhaps the place to meet several old friends. Probably nowhere else in Alpine setting has it required two volumes to explain the fate of the hero; but such was the case for Sherlock Holmes. In the last chapter of Conan Doyle's *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893), Holmes and Watson arrived in Strasbourg only to learn of Moriarty's escape. A few days later, while walking along the border of the Daubensee, a large rock fell, Holmes in an instant raced up to the ridge; the guide assured him that stones often fell at the spot; Holmes said nothing, merely smiled. On May 3rd they set off from Meiringen to view the Reichenbach falls en route to Rosenlaui. Watson was separated from Holmes by a decoy message, and saw him (as Watson then believed) for the last time. "There was Holmes's Alpine-stock still leaning against the rock by which I had left him . . . . the young Swiss had gone too. He had probably been in the pay of Moriarty, and had left the two men together." Holmes disappeared in the chapter called "The Final Problem," and his reappearance is explained, three years later, in "The Adventure of the Empty House," but are the Baker Street Irregulars aware of how much the author's actual experience in Switzerland serves as the background of these episodes? Conan Doyle crossed the Mayenfelder Furka on skis in 1902 from Davos to Arosa, a feat remembered in mountaineering circles as a pioneer expedition.

James Hilton, in *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1934) records that in the spring of 1896, when he was 48, Mr. Chips stayed on alone at Wastdale Head in the Lake District. "One day, climbing on Great Gable, he noticed a girl waving excitedly from a dangerous-looking ledge. Thinking she was in difficulties, he hastened toward her, but in so doing slipped himself and wrenched his ankle. As it turned out, she was not in difficulties, but was merely signalling to a friend farther down on the mountain, she was an expert climber; better even than Chips, who was pretty good." Somehow it is rather satisfying to know that Mr. Chips loved the mountains and that he was "pretty good."

Is there an authentic masterpiece among Alpine novels? One at least, and we turn with delight to a consideration of its joyous pages:

Tartarin on the Alps. When Daudet, whose centenary all climbers should have celebrated in 1940, created his magniloquent character, the Matterhorn disaster was still within range of memory. Daudet had seen Doré's engravings, was familiar with Whymper's *Scrambles* and could, therefore, introduce a realistic note into his great comedy of climbing. "A stout man, thick-set and broad-shouldered, who stopped to puff and blow, and to shake the snow from his leggings, which, like his cap, were of yellow cloth, and from his knitted muffler, which permitted scarcely anything to be seen of his face but a few tufts of grayish whiskers and a pair of enormous green goggles, like the eye-pieces of a stereoscope. An ice-axe, an alpenstock, a knapsack, a coil of rope, calks, and iron hooks suspended from the belt of a Norfolk jacket with deep flaps, completed the accoutremont of this perfect Alpine climber."

Tartarin had ordered from a reliable locksmith at Avignon "*crampons,* or calks, such as are recommended by Whymper, for his boots, and an ice-axe of the Kennedy pattern; he also procured a cooking-camp, two waterproof blankets, and two hundred feet of rope of his own invention, twisted with iron wire."

Daudet even knew of the blind American climber (Sir Francis Campbell), for Tartarin meets him in the Guggi Hut, and one may be almost certain that Daudet had read some of Mark Twain's stories. "Those horrible crevasses! If you tumble into one of them?" "You tumble on snow, Monsieur Tartarin," replies Gonzague, "and you will come to no harm: there is always at the bottom a porter—a *chasseur*—somebody who is able to assist you up again, who will brush your clothes, shake off the snow, and respectfully inquire whether 'Monsieur has any luggage?'"

Finally Daudet brings his narrative to a climax by using the old incident of the cut rope, but with the new turn of cutting it *twice*. "They only found on the Dôme du Gôuter an end of rope, which remained in a fissure of the ice. But curiously enough, this rope was cut at both ends as with a sharp instrument.

Sir Frederic Pollock, then librarian of the Alpine Club, reviewing the book, said: "We conceive that M. Daudet, if not a climber himself, looks with proper respect on true mountaineering; for he has avoided every temptation to jest or moralize at its expense,

and we have not met with a single phrase which any sensible member of the craft will take otherwise than in good part."

Daudet is the perfect cure for the malaise which one is likely to feel afflicted after a bout with Alpine thrillers. *Tartarin sur les Alpes* first appeared in 1885, and Henry Frith's English translation was published in 1892. It has a freshness today that is wanting in novels a year or two old. Did we read it in school, and do we remember it as a bore? That was before our knowledge of human nature was developed and tempered by experience. Let us read it again and realize, perhaps for the first time, its vitality, its humor, its charm.

It was not until 1926 that the Alpine Journal followed its review of *Running Water* with extended comment on other works of fiction. Two French books were then singled out for attention. How unlike *Tartarin* these grim, far-fetched romances! Andre Armandy's *Terre de Suspicion* carried its cast into the air: "Aeroplane No. 1 sets forth from Paris to fly to Mount Everest. It fails to return. Its twin brother sets out to hunt for it. Aeroplane No. 2 gets into trouble owing to magnetic rocks in the Hindu Kush. It eventually crashes, but not before the hero and a charming lady reporter, hitherto concealed *outside* the luggage tank, have contrived, accompanied by their kits and a complete arsenal, to land in parachute. They set out on foot to find the survivors of *Avion* No. 1. These are discovered among the Lost Tribes of Kafiristan. . . ." But enough! Except to mention that the pilot of the first plane refrained from dropping a French flag on the summit of Everest, having seen there a Union Jack, left by Mallory and Irvine!

Bordeaux's *Les Jeux Dangereux* could not have been a worse book, but we find it treated with even less tolerance: "The less said about this work the better. The author is a well-known mountaineer and as such ought to have known where good taste begins and ends. The scene is laid in Mürren. There is a Baronet who has a Marquis as a son and another who is an Earl. To do him justice, or injustice, the author is anglophile. We could forgive him everything if it were not for a really outrageous 'interview' with a dying mountaineer whom the whole Alpine world reveres. The general bad taste of this 'interview' is astounding and has seldom been equalled in fact or fiction."

Two French novels are mentioned above because they exist in English translations, and two because of the comments quoted from the Alpine Journal. But foreign language fiction as a whole lies beyond the limits of this casual and incomplete survey. There is a great deal of it, and probably many English-speaking readers are familiar with the representative productions of Charles Gos (*Près de Névés et Glaciers, La Croix du Cervin, La Nuit des Drus*) and Georg Freiherr von Ompteda (*Aus Grossen Höhen, Es Ist Zeit*). Franz Wichmann's novel, *Die Alpinisten* (1900), is said to be the first in which the characters are primarily climbers, the eternal triangle being based on the poet-hero's opinion that no married woman ought to climb, "for she belongs to her husband and not to neck-breaking mountain peaks." Several hundred titles are listed in Dreyer's *Bücherverzeichnis der Alpenvereins-Bücherei,* published in 1927 and by no means exhaustive at that time. The Swiss John Knittel has been translated: *Via Mala* was issued in an English version in 1935. It is a sordid tale of parental oppression and family feud, having as its central character mad Jonas Lauretz, sot and libertine, descendant of a Napoleonic captain who first worked the silver mines of the Vorder-Rhein and duped the Bishop of Chur.

We may note in passing a striking difference of tone between Continental and English-language mountaineering fiction; an atmosphere of frustration and despair pervades the former; the Germans grapple wilfully with the grim reaper; the French soliloquize gloomily on the theme of defeat. Neither school is happy, and their attitudes are influenced by something more than merely that complex of impressions and ideas which Ruskin termed "the mountain gloom." The mountains are a place of escape, but futility, mental and physical suicide are there, of all places, made substitutes for peace. Many otherwise well-drawn characters would have saved themselves much pain and exertion, and have come to quicker, though to themselves less exalted ends, had they remained at home and jumped from the nearest bridge.

Perhaps it would be well to close on a note of cheer. Mark Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* is as much a work of fiction as of fact, and like *Tartarin,* will serve to raise spirits depressed by the violence and gloom that pervade the bulk of Alpine literature. "The chamois," writes Mark, "is a black or brown creature no bigger than a mustard seed; you do not have to go after it, it comes after

you . . . . it will skip a thousand times its own length in one jump." This is no doubt an observation based on personal experience. Mark had the seeing eye; great humorists always have it, and his comic extravagances are unfailingly close to life. Hear what he has to say of a typical tourist in an Alpine resort: "You see, his alpenstock is his trophy; his name is burned upon it; and if he has climbed a hill, or jumped a brook, or traversed a brick yard with it, he has the name of the place burned upon it. . . . It is worth three francs when he buys it, but a bonanza could not purchase it after his great deeds have been inscribed upon it."

In an unkind moment he described the Edelweiss as a fuzzy blossom "the color of bad cigar ashes [which appears] to be made of a cheap quality of grey plush." However, to find out what mountain-climbing was like, he wisely consulted Hinchliff's *Summer Months Among the Alps,* and there is evidence that he had read Albert Smith's *Story of Mont Blanc.* Mark's expedition to the Riffelberg went Albert's one better in consisting of "198 persons, including the mules; or 205, including the cows." In addition to 17 guides, there were 4 surgeons, 3 chaplains and 15 barkeepers, and, for the comfort of his caravan, he included 22 barrels of whiskey and 2000 cigars in his stores.

At Chamonix Mark stopped at the old Hôtel de Londres, long since destroyed by fire, and noted the tablets to de Saussure and Albert Smith. It is altogether surprising how many Alpine figures he knew at least by reputation, for we find him mentioning, in addition to those already named, Balmat, Forbes, Hamel, Stephen d'Arve, Tyndall and Whymper. When he starts back from the Riffelberg, he tells us that he "was aware that the movement of glaciers is an established fact, for I had read of it in Baedeker; so I resolved to take passage for Zermatt on the great Gorner Glacier." Delayed by the slowness of the motion, he found fault with the Government.

The popularity of Albert Smith's Mont Blanc show is recalled, since it "made people as anxious to see it as if it owed them money." Mark himself was content to ascend Mont Blanc by telescope for three francs, and his attitude toward climbing seems to have been one of bemused tolerance rather than enthusiasm. After meeting the redoubtable Rev. Girdlestone he admits that he "would rather face whole Hyde Parks of artillery than the ghastly forms of death

which he has faced among the peaks and precipices of the mountains."

Nevertheless, Mark had glimpsed the vision. In the midst of his drolleries we discover some splendid descriptive passages, scarcely excelled in the entire range of Alpine literature. "The cloven valleys of the lower world swam in a tinted mist which veiled the ruggedness of their crags and ribs and ragged forests, and turned all the forbidding regions into a soft and rich and sensuous paradise." And again, in a description of the Jungfrau at twilight, he expresses the nostalgic memories of countless mountaineers: "One had the sense of being under the brooding contemplation of a spirit, not an inert mass of rocks and ice—a spirit which had looked down through the slow drift of ages, upon a million vanished races of men, and judged them, and would judge a million more—and still be there, watching, unchanged and unchangeable, after all life should be gone and the earth have become a vacant desolation."

Mark Twain and Alphonse Daudet will be followed one day by a writer who will give us a book about the mountains comparable in quality with theirs; it need not be a comedy; the mountains should provide an ideal setting for a noble and serious work of fiction—as indeed they have in Thomas Mann's *Magic Mountain.* While there is a chance that this masterpiece will appear from the press tomorrow, we are not hopeful. We shall wait for it, in all probability, many a year, and in the meantime be obliged to content ourselves with lurid tales of crime on the heights. There is a good deal of innocent entertainment to be had from a well-composed thriller, and the problem of combining murder with mountaineering is one we recommend to the ingenuity of fabricators of this type of story. They have used the mountaineering scene often, as we have shown, but not to the best advantage. There are many unwritten shockers that we should like to read, among them *Huggermugger in the Hut, Mayhem on the Mönch, The Corpse in the Col, The Poisoned Piton, Rogue's Rope,* and *The Fiend of the Faulhorn.* We offer these suggestions to authors free of all restriction; they should have little difficulty in proceeding from this point. And we who, in our armchair moments, think of the high levels in terms of sculduggery and gore, in which natural forces play no part—we, Tartarins at heart and yearning for yet another thrill, would have more of it. With hemoglobin primed for 20,000 ft., we await the perfect crampon crime.

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[Titles of works in English or English translation only have been included, the list being admittedly incomplete. The contents being in some instances unknown to us, it may be that some titles are incorrectly listed as fiction.]

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