

"THEY SAW A MAN STANDING UP GLARING AT THEM."
(See page 250.)

Ulrich the Guide.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT, BY ALYS HALLARD.)



SIMILAR to all the other little wood-built inns scattered here and there in the Hautes-Alpes, just below the glaciers in those bare, rocky pathways of the snow-capped mountain peaks, the Schwarenbach inn serves as a refuge for travellers through the Gemmi Pass.

During six months of the year it is inhabited by its owner, Jean Hauser, and his family, but as soon as the snow begins to get deep in the valley, so that the road to Loèche is only just practicable, the father and mother with their daughter and three sons leave their little mountain home in charge of the two guides, an old man named Gaspard Hari, and young Ulrich Kungsi, and Sam, the huge mountain dog.

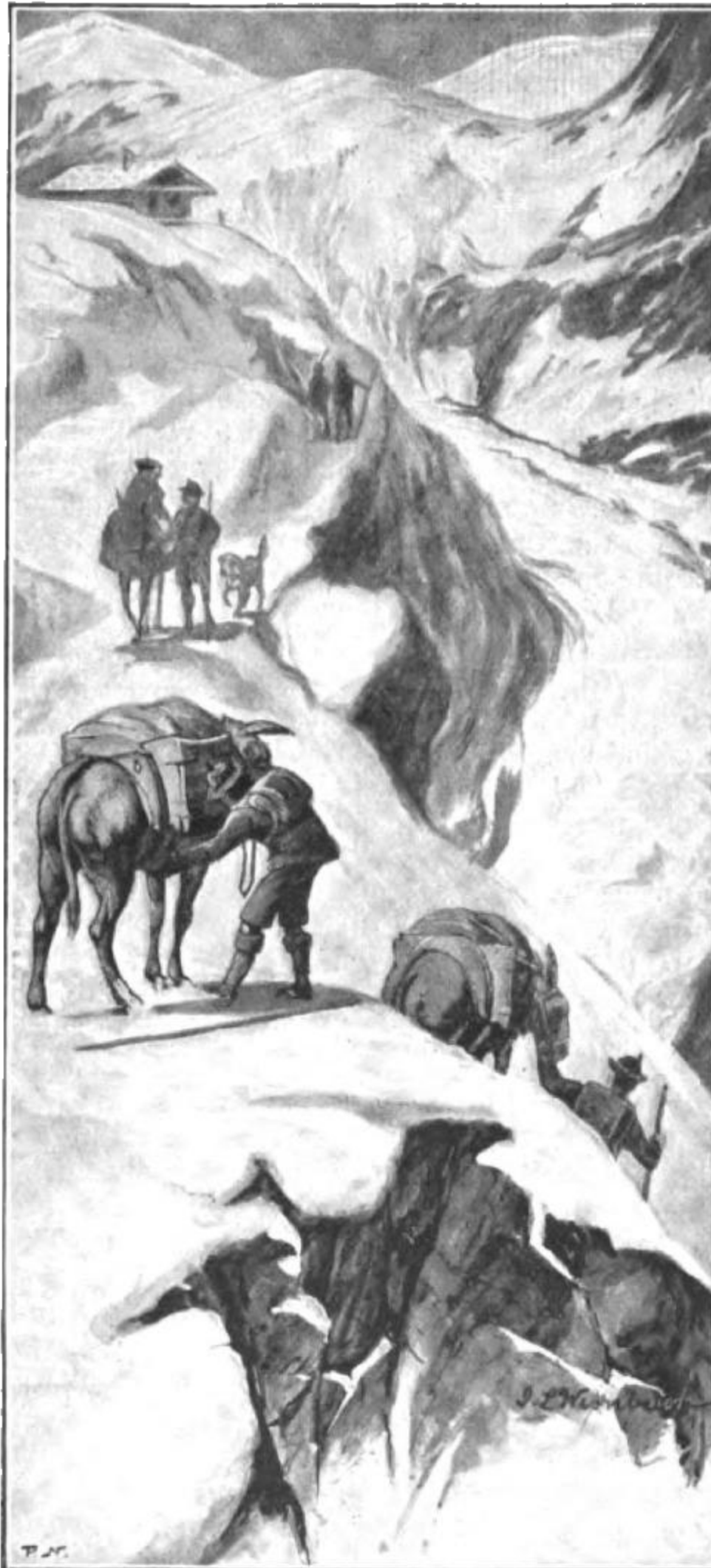
The two men with their faithful keeper remain until the following spring in their snowy prison, having no other view than the immense white slope of the Balmhorn, surrounded by pale, glittering mountain peaks, until they are finally shut up, blocked, as it were, buried under the snow, which heaps itself up around them, and then presses close round the little house, bars the door, reaches the windows, and, in fact, wraps the inn round completely in its white mantle, and then falls thickly on the roof.

On the day when Hauser and his family set out on their journey back to Loèche, the winter had set in, and the descent was not without danger. The three sons went on first with the mules laden with luggage; then came Jeanne Hauser and the daughter, Louise, mounted on another mule.

The two guides walked behind with the father, for they were going to escort the little family to the beginning of the descent.

They passed by the frozen lake which is between the great rocks near the inn, and then they continued along the valley, which looked like an immense white sheet, on each side of which rose the snowy peaks. A flood of sunshine fell on the white, shining, frozen desert, lighting it up with a cold, blinding flame. There was no sign of life in this ocean of mountains, no movement in this vast, measureless solitude, not a sound broke the profound silence.

Gradually the young guide Ulrich Kungsi, a tall, strong-looking Swiss with long legs, got ahead of Hauser and old Gaspard Hari, and overtook the mule on which the two women were riding. The younger of them watched him advancing, and a happy light shone in her eyes. She was a pretty young girl, but her fair hair and her pale cheeks looked as though they had lost their colour



"THE DESCENT WAS NOT WITHOUT DANGER!"

through these long sojourns in the mountains surrounded by ice and snow. When Ulrich had overtaken them he slackened his pace and walked alongside of them, his hand resting on the crupper.

The Mère Hauser began at once to go over again all the details she had given him about the precautions necessary for the long winter season in the little inn. It was his first winter up there, whilst old Gaspard had for the last fourteen years spent his winter months under the snow in the Schwarenbach inn.

Ulrich Kungsi listened, but his eyes were fixed on the young girl, and he did not take in the sense of the words which fell on his ears. Every now and then he nodded his head and answered, "Yes, Madame Hauser," but his thoughts were far away, though his tranquil-looking face remained impassable. They arrived at the Daube Lake, the long surface of which, all frozen as it was, stretched out smooth and flat as far as the end of the valley.

On the right the dark rocks of the Daubenhorn rose up perpendicularly by the enormous moraines of the Lämmeren glacier upon which the Wildstrubel looked.

As they approached the Gemmi Pass, which is the beginning of the descent to Loeche, they suddenly came in sight of the immense horizon of the Valais Alps, from which they were separated by the deep, wide valley of the Rhône. It looked, in the distance, like a whole world of white, irregular mountain-tops, some flat and some pointed, and all glittering in the sunshine. There was the Mischabel, with its two horns; the huge mass of the Weisshorn; the heavy-looking Bruneckhorn; the high, formidable pyramid of the Matterhorn, the man-slayer; and that monstrous coquette, the Dent Blanche. Then, down below them in a hole at the bottom of a frightful abyss, they could see Loeche, the houses of which looked like so many grains of sand thrown down into that enormous crevice which the Gemmi Pass closes, and which begins over on the other side on the Rhône. The mule stopped at the beginning of the path which goes winding along, turning back and going on again, fantastic and marvellous the whole length of the mountain on the right until it reaches the almost invisible village at its foot.

The two women dismounted on to the snowy ground and waited until Hauser and Gaspard came up with them.

"Well, good-bye," said Hauser, shaking hands with the two guides, "and keep up your courage till we meet next year."

"Yes, good-bye till next year," said old Gaspard.

The Mère Hauser then shook hands with the guides, and then it was Louise's turn. Ulrich Kungsi whispered, as he held her hand in his: "Don't forget us up there under the snow," and she answered, "No"; but so quietly that he guessed what she said rather than heard it.

"Good-bye again, then," said Jean Hauser, "and take care of yourselves up there, you know," and shaking hands once more with the guides, he stepped on in front of his wife and daughter to lead the way down to the village. In a short time they were out of sight, hidden by the turn of the winding path.

The two men then retraced their steps and walked slowly back in the direction of the Schwarenbach inn. They went along, side by side, without speaking. They would be alone now—face to face with each other for the next four or five months.

Presently, Gaspard Hari began to tell about his life the previous winter. He had had with him Michael Canol, who was now too old to venture it again, as, of course, there is no knowing what may happen during those long months of solitude. It had not been so monotonous after all, for the chief thing is just to make up one's mind to it from the very first day, and then, too, they had found all kinds of things to do, and had played at various indoor games when they wanted a change.

Ulrich Kungsi listened mechanically to the old man's words, but his thoughts were with the little family on their way down to the village along the winding path of the Gemmi Pass. Soon the two men caught sight of the little inn, which was only just visible like a tiny black speck at the foot of the monstrous wave of snow. When at last they arrived at their destination and opened the door, the large dog with his curly hair began to jump up and frolic round them.

"Now, then, my lad," said old Gaspard, "we've got no woman here now to cook our dinner; you set to work and peel the potatoes, and we'll soon have something ready between us."

The following morning the time seemed to go very slowly; at least, so thought Ulrich Kungsi. Old Gaspard sat by the fire smoking his pipe, whilst the young man gazed out of the window at the dazzling white mountain opposite the house.

In the afternoon he went out for a walk and amused himself with following the tracks of the mule on which the two women had

ridden the day before. When he reached the Gemmi Pass he lay down on the ground at the edge of the abyss, and looked down at Loeche.

The village in its rocky well was not yet hidden by the snow, which, however, had nearly reached it, but was stopped by the pine forests which sheltered the environs. Its low houses, as seen from that height, looked like so many stones in a meadow. Louise Hauser was down there now in one of those grey houses. In which one, though? Ulrich Kungsi could not tell, as he was too far away to be able to distinguish them separately. How he did wish he could go down to the village, now, before it was too late.

The sun had by this time disappeared behind the high crest of Wildstrubel, and the young man wended his way once more back to the inn. Gaspard was still smoking, but on seeing his companion he proposed a game of cards. They sat down to the little table facing each other and played for a long time, and then had their supper and went to bed.



"THEY PLAYED FOR A LONG TIME."

The next few days were just like that first one—clear and cold, but no fresh snow. Old Gaspard would spend his afternoons looking out for the eagles and the rare birds which ventured on these icy summits, whilst Ulrich took his favourite walk down to the Gemmi Pass in order to have a glimpse of the village, and then on his return they would play at cards or dominoes, and stake some trifling object in order to add to the interest.

One morning Gaspard, who was up first, called out to his companion. A moving

cloud, thick but light, of white foam was falling on them and all round them noiselessly, and was burying them gradually under a heavy, mossy mattress. This continued for four days and four nights, and the two men had, to keep the door and windows clear, to hollow out a passage and cut some steps in order to get up on to this icy powder which, after twelve hours' frost, was harder than the granite of the moraines. They had to live now almost like prisoners, scarcely venturing outside of their dwelling, and each of them accomplished regularly the everyday household tasks which he had from the first undertaken. Ulrich Kungsi did all the cleaning and the washing, and he also cut and carried the wood, whilst Gaspard's share of the work was the cooking and seeing to the fire.

Their regular, monotonous tasks were relieved by their games at cards and dominoes, and both of them being very quiet and placid, they never quarrelled by any chance.

There were never any impatient or sharp words, and they were never even bad-tempered, for they had both taken in a good stock of resignation in order to be able to endure this winter sojourn on the top of the mountain. Sometimes old Gaspard would take his gun and go out

chamois hunting, and whenever he had luck there was great feasting in the little Schwarenbach inn.

One morning he set out on one of these expeditions. The thermometer was eighteen degrees below freezing-point, and as the sun was not yet up the wily huntsman hoped to surprise his prey round about the Wildstrubel.

Ulrich, finding himself alone, did not get up till towards ten o'clock. He was naturally a good sleeper, and would often have liked to stay in bed in the morning, but was

ashamed to give way to his laziness when Gaspard was there, as the old guide was such an early riser and so energetic always. On the morning in question Ulrich took his breakfast in a leisurely way and gave the dog his. Sam, too, spent nearly all his time now, night and day, in front of the fire sleeping.

When the young man got up from the table a strange, sad kind of feeling came over him, a sort of horror of the solitude, and he wished that Gaspard were there to have their customary game of cards. He missed it, as it had become quite a habit now to sit down after breakfast and have their game until it was time to prepare for the next meal.

Later on, as he could not settle down to anything, he set out to go and meet Gaspard, who was to be back home towards four o'clock. The snow had levelled the deep valley, filled up all the crevices, hidden the two lakes entirely from sight, and covered the rocks so that there was nothing to be seen now between the two immense mountains but an enormous smooth white basin, all dazzling and frozen.

For the last three weeks Ulrich had not been down to the edge of the precipice to look at the little village. He wanted to go there before climbing the mountain slopes which led to Wildstrubel. Loeche was now also under the snow, and the houses were scarcely visible at all, buried as they were under this pale mantle. Turning to the right, Ulrich reached the Lämmeren glacier. He went on with his long, mountaineer strides, his iron-tipped staff striking the snow, which was as hard as stone, whilst, with his eagle glance, he looked round in search of a black moving speck in the distance on this measureless sheet of snow.

When he had arrived at the edge of the glacier he stopped suddenly, wondering to himself whether Gaspard had taken this road, and then he walked on along the moraines with a quicker step and a feeling every minute more and more anxious. It began to get dusk, a pink shade came over the snow, and a dry, frosty wind blew in gusts over its crystal surface. Ulrich called out in a shrill voice that vibrated through the air and broke the death-like silence in which the mountains were wrapped. It could be heard for a long distance over the deep, still waves of the frozen foam, just like the cry of a bird over the waves of the sea, and then it died away again and there was no answer. Ulrich walked on and on, and the sun was sinking gradually lower and lower behind the

mountain crests, which were still purple from the reflection of the sky; but the deep valley itself was turning a leaden grey.

Suddenly the young man was seized with a strange, nameless fear. It seemed to him as though the silence, the cold, the solitude, and the winter death of these mountains were entering his very soul, and as though they would stop his blood and freeze it in his veins, as though they would stiffen his limbs and make of him a motionless, frozen being. This idea took possession of him, and he set off running as fast as he could go towards their dwelling. "Gaspard must have come back by now," he said to himself; the old man had doubtless taken another road, and he would find him seated before the fire with his dead chamois at his feet.

Presently he came in sight of the inn. There was no smoke from the chimney. Ulrich hurried on faster and faster, but when he opened the door there was only Sam, who jumped up to greet him; Gaspard Hari had not yet returned. Terrified at the old man's long absence, Ulrich turned round as though he expected to see him hiding in one of the corners. He then busied himself with lighting the fire and making the soup, hoping that by the time the evening meal was ready Gaspard would be back. Every few minutes he would go to the door and look out to see whether he were not in sight.

It was night now, a pale, wan sort of night such as one has on the mountains, a livid dusk, lighted up from the edge of the horizon by a clear, yellowish crescent, which was just ready to fall behind the mountain-tops. The young man went back into the house, sat down and warmed his hands and feet at the fire, while he turned over in his own mind all the accidents which were possible.

Gaspard might have fallen and broken his leg, he might have slipped into a hole, or stumbled and twisted his foot. If so, he would be lying there in the snow, chilled through and through, and stiff with the cold; he would be in utter despair, shouting for help, calling out with all the strength he had left, and his voice would fall on the silent air, and there would be no one to answer him.

Where was he, though? The mountain was so vast, so rugged, and so dangerous to explore, especially at this season of the year, that ten or twenty guides might search in every direction for a whole week before finding a man in that immensity. Ulrich Kumsi, however, decided that if Gaspard Hari were not back by midnight, he would set out with Sam to search for him.

He began to make preparations for his expedition. He put enough food to last for two days in a knapsack, took his steel *crampons*, and fastened a long, stout cord round and round his body, and examined his iron-tipped crook and his axe, with which he would probably have to cut steps in the ice. He then sat down and waited. The fire was blazing in the grate and the dog snoring away on the hearth, whilst the clock was beating time regularly within its wooden case like the heart of a human being. Ulrich sat there waiting, listening intently for any sound in the distance, shuddering when the wind rustled over the roof and against the walls.

The clock struck midnight, and the first stroke startled him. Then feeling that he was all unnerved, he put some water on the fire to boil in order to make himself a cup of strong coffee before setting out. When the clock struck again he roused Sam and then, opening the door, started in the direction of Wildstrubel. For over five hours he continued his ascent, scaling rocks, cutting footholds in the ice, advancing slowly, and sometimes having to haul up the dog after him with his cord.

It was nearly six o'clock when he arrived on the top of one of the peaks where he knew Gaspard was in the habit of coming to hunt the chamois. Ulrich waited now for the daylight. The sky was getting paler over his head, and suddenly a strange light flashed

Gradually the highest peaks in the distance changed to a delicate, fleshy-pink hue, and then the red sun appeared behind the heavy giant heights of the Bernese Alps.

Ulrich Kungsi now started on his way once more. He walked along like a huntsman, with his head bent, looking out for tracks, and encouraging the dog every now and then with a "Search, Sam! Search! Good dog!"

He began to descend the mountain again, now gazing down at every precipice, and now and again calling out; but his voice always died away in the dumb immensity, and there was no answer on any side. Sometimes he would kneel down, with his ear on the ground to listen, and he would imagine he heard a voice, and would set off again quickly, calling all the way; but not another sound would he hear, and he would have to sit down to rest, exhausted and despairing.

Towards mid-day he took some refreshment and fed the dog, who was as worn out as his master, and then they started once more on their search. When night came on they were still going along, although they must have walked over thirty miles of mountain road. As they were too far from the little inn to think of getting back, and too tired to be able to continue their way, Ulrich hollowed out a hole in the snow and crouched down in it, with the dog, under a rug that he had brought with him slung over his shoulders.

They lay down together, the young man and



"THEY LAY DOWN TOGETHER."

over the immense ocean of the pale mountain-tops which stretched for a hundred leagues around him. It was as though this strange, weird light had risen from the snow itself, to fall again into space.

the dog, trying to warm themselves by huddling close together, but frozen to the very marrow of their bones, both of them. Ulrich scarcely slept at all; he was haunted by all kinds of visions and shivering all over in every limb.

The day was just beginning to dawn when he got up. His legs were as stiff as bars of iron, and he was so low-spirited that he could have cried out in his anguish, whilst his heart beat so fast that he felt it would stop altogether at the slightest sound he might now hear.

The idea suddenly came to him that he too was going to die of cold in this terrible solitude, and the very horror of such a death roused him to action. He began to descend the mountain, this time in the direction of the inn. He stumbled and fell several times, and the poor dog lagged behind, limping along on his three paws. They reached Schwarenbach towards four o'clock in the afternoon, and found the house empty just as they had left it. Ulrich made a fire, and after he and the dog had eaten something, he was so worn out that he fell asleep, for he was absolutely incapable of thinking about anything.

He slept for a long time—a very long time—completely overmastered by invincible slumber. Suddenly the sound of a voice, of a cry of his own name, "Ulrich!" roused him, and he got up hastily. Had he been dreaming? Was it one of those strange cries which one hears in dreams when one's mind is ill at ease? No; he heard it again, now distinctly—that cry which vibrated, and which seemed to have entered into his very soul.

Most certainly someone had called, and it was his name he had heard—"Ulrich!" Someone was there near to the house, there was no doubt about it.

He rushed to the door, opened it, and shouted with all his might:—

"Gaspard, Gaspard, are you there?"

There was no answer, not a sound, not a murmur, not a moan, nothing. It was dark, but the snow could be seen as white as ever.

The wind had risen, that bitter, icy wind which cracks the stones and leaves nothing alive on those deserted heights. It swept along in sudden gusts, more withering and more deadly even than the fiery wind of the desert.

Ulrich cried out again: "Gaspard! Gaspard! Gaspard!"

Then he waited again and listened. All was dumb on the mountain. And now a mortal terror took possession of him, and he shook in all his bones. He rushed back into the house, closed the door, and fastened the bolts, and then sank down on a chair, shivering all over from head to foot.

He was certain, absolutely certain, that his comrade had just now called him with his dying breath. Of that he was sure, just as

one is sure that one is alive or that one is eating a piece of bread. Gaspard Hari must have been slowly dying during two days and three nights down in some hole, in one of those deep, immaculate-looking ravines, the whiteness of which is more sinister than the dense gloom of the subterranean passages.

He had been dying during those two days and three nights, and now a few minutes ago he had drawn his last breath as he thought of his young comrade, and his soul was no sooner free than it had taken its flight towards the inn where Ulrich had been sleeping, and it had called him by virtue of that mysterious and terrible power which the souls of the dead have of haunting the living. It had cried out, this voiceless soul, to the soul of the young man as he slept; it had uttered its last farewell, or its reproach, or perhaps its curse, on the man who had not sought long enough on the mountain.

And Ulrich felt as though it was there with him, this soul, near him, behind the wall on the other side of the door which he had just bolted. It was roaming about like a night-bird which rustles against the lighted windows with its feathers, and the young man almost shrieked aloud in his awe and terror. He wanted to get up and rush away, but he dared not open the door; he dared not now, and he never would dare to from henceforth, for the phantom would remain there day and night, hovering round the inn, until the old man's body had been found and placed in consecrated ground in some cemetery.

It began to get light, and Ulrich felt more reassured at the return of the brilliant sunshine. He prepared his meal, fed the dog, and then he sat down again in despair and torture at the thought of the old man lying amongst the snow.

When once more the darkness began to cover the mountain, fresh terrors assailed him. He walked about in the dark kitchen, lighted only by one flickering candle. He walked backwards and forwards from one side to the other, taking long strides and listening—listening intently to hear whether the fearful cry of the previous night came across the gloomy stillness of the mountain. And he felt himself alone, the wretched man, more alone than any human being had ever been!

He was alone in the midst of this immense snowy desert, alone more than six thousand feet above any inhabited dwelling, right up above the world of human beings—alone in this frozen land. A wild idea took possession

of him, to get away at all costs—to get away, no matter where, no matter how, to rush down to Loeche, to throw himself down the precipice! But, alas!—he did not even dare to open the door, so sure was he that the other one, the dead man, would bar the road for him, in order not to stay up here alone either.

Towards midnight, tired of pacing up and down, overwhelmed with anguish and terror, he sat down on one of the kitchen chairs, for he dreaded his bed just as one dreads a haunted spot.

Suddenly, once more, the strident cry of the night before fell upon his ears, and this time so piercing, so shrill, that Ulrich instinctively put up his arms to ward off the spirit, and in doing so lost his balance and fell over.

Sam, the dog, roused by the noise, began to howl, as dogs do when they are terrified, and began to walk round the dwelling to discover the danger. At the door he bent his head and sniffed along the ground, his ears pricked up and his tail straight out.

Ulrich, wild with terror, had risen from the ground and, holding the chair in his hand as a weapon, he called out, "Stay there! Do not come in: I will kill you if you come in." And the dog, more and more excited by his master's threatening tone, barked furiously at the invisible enemy who was daring to defy Ulrich.

Gradually, however, Sam began to calm down, and at last went back to his place on the hearth. He did not go to sleep again though, but just lay there looking anxious, his eyes shining, and growling every now and then. Ulrich, too, managed to master his terror, but feeling unnerved he opened the cupboard, and taking out a bottle of brandy, he drank several glasses one after the other.

His thoughts began to get confused, but his courage came back and a fever began to burn in his veins. The following day he scarcely touched any food; but he drank more brandy; and for several days he went on like this—drinking like some brute.

Every time the thought of Gaspard Hari came to him he would go to the brandy-bottle and drink until he fell down intoxicated. He would then remain there, his limbs feeble, his face against the ground, in a kind of drunken stupor.

No sooner, however, had the burning liquor lost its effect than the same terrible cry, "Ulrich!" roused him like some pistol-shot through his brain, and he would get up and stagger along, calling Sam to help him.

The poor dog seemed to be losing his senses too, like his master, for he would dart to the door, scratch with his paws, and gnaw at it with his long, white teeth, whilst the young man would go back to the brandy and drink a draught of it like water, so that it might once more deaden his terror and lull him to sleep. At the end of three weeks the stock of brandy had come to an end, and this continual intoxication had only calmed at intervals his terror, which now became more and more awful.

It had become a monomania with him, and his month's intoxication had exaggerated it so that now, in the midst of this absolute solitude, it increased day by day.

He paced up and down in his dwelling



"ULRICH THREW HIS WEIGHT AGAINST THE OAK SIDEBORD."

like a wild beast in his cage, putting his ear to the keyhole of the door at times to listen whether the other were still there and defying him in angry tones through the wall. At night, no sooner did he begin to doze, worn out as he was by fatigue, than the sound of the voice would make him spring to his feet.

At last one night, in sheer desperation, he rushed to the door and opened it, so that he might see who was calling him and oblige him to be silent. A gust of icy wind met him and seemed to freeze him through and through, and he banged the door to and bolted it again, without seeing that Sam had bounded out.

Then, shuddering, he threw some wood on the fire and sat down to get warm again. Presently he heard a scratching noise at the wall which made him start, and then there was a sound like a human voice wailing.

"Go away!" he shrieked, and a long, sad moan answered him.

All the reason which he had left gave way now in the face of this new horror.

He kept repeating his loud cry, "Go away," and wandered about looking for some corner in which to take refuge.

The moaning continued, and the other one wandered round and round the house outside scratching against all the walls. Ulrich threw all his weight against the oak sideboard, full as it was of provisions and of china, and with almost superhuman strength he managed at length to push it against the door as a barricade. Then piling up everything that remained in the way of furniture, to the very mattresses off the beds, he stopped up the window just as though the enemy were besieging the house. Some terrible, dismal groans were now heard from outside, and Ulrich answered by groans also.

Some days and nights passed like this: the one outside the house roaming round and round it, scratching at the walls and the door with such force, that it seemed as though the wood-built building would be demolished; and all the time the other one inside the house listened to every movement and answered the terrible, lingering moans by fearful shrieks of terror.

At last one night there was silence again outside the house. Ulrich could hear nothing, and, thoroughly exhausted as he was, he lay down on the floor and fell asleep. When he awoke he had no memory of anything: not a thought came to him, it was as though his very brain had been emptied by that overpowering slumber. He was hungry, and he found some food and ate it.

Winter was over and the Gemmi Pass was once more practicable, so the Hauser family set out from the village to go back to their inn on the mountain. When they reached the top of the pass, the two women got on to their mules to continue the ascent, and they began to talk of the two guides who had been shut up on the mountain all the winter. As soon as the inn was in sight they saw that it was still well covered with snow, but there was smoke rising from the chimney, and this reassured Jean Hauser.

As they came nearer, they discovered on the very threshold of the inn the skeleton of an animal which had been torn to pieces by the eagles—a huge skeleton it was, and lying on its side.

They all examined it, and the Mère Hauser exclaimed, "It must be Sam!"

"Gaspard!" called out the father, and he was answered by a cry from inside the house, but it was a strange, piercing cry, and sounded more like the utterance of some animal than that of a human being. The Père Hauser called again: "Gaspard! Halloa!" and another cry like the first one was the only answer.

The father and sons then tried to open the door, but it resisted their efforts. They went into the empty stable and fetched a long piece of wood, which, with all their strength, they managed to push in. The door cracked and finally gave way, the wood breaking in pieces. Then there was a fearful noise, which seemed to shake the house, and there inside, behind the sideboard, which had turned over on to the floor, they saw a man standing up glaring at them—a man with long hair falling on to his shoulders and a long, wild-looking beard, and his clothes hanging in rags on his body.

The others did not recognise him, but Louise Hauser exclaimed, "Oh, mother, it's Ulrich!" and then the Mère Hauser saw that it was indeed Ulrich, although his hair was snow-white. He let them come up to him; he let them touch him; but he did not answer any of their questions.

They took him down to Loeche, and the doctors there pronounced him mad. His case, however, was not hopeless, though his recovery must of necessity be slow.

No one ever knew what had become of his companion, the old guide, Gaspard Hari. Louise Hauser nearly died that summer. She had a long illness, the cause of which was attributed to the cold on the mountain.