

**JACQUES BALMAT, OR  
THE FIRST  
ASCENT OF MONT  
BLANC; A TRUE STORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649265121

Jacques Balmat, or The first ascent of Mont Blanc; A True Story by T. Louis Oxley

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**T. LOUIS OXLEY**

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A TRUE STORY.

BY

T. LOUIS OXLEY.

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LONDON:

KERBY AND ENDEAN, 190 OXFORD STREET.

OATLANDS PARK: J. NORTH.

AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1881.

## P R E F A C E .

Whilst passing a month, during the last summer at Chamounix, I met with M. PAYOT's "Guide Itineraire au Mont Blanc," in which I found the following story. It was taken by him from ALEXANDRE DUMAS' book of Travel in Switzerland.

In addition to JACQUES BALMAT's *vive voce* narrative, I have given MICHAEL CARRIÈRE's account of the sad death of the intrepid Climber.

This story will be as a thrice-told-tale to the Alpinist.

Still there are many who have not seen Mont Blanc, and many who have never heard the name of the man who first ascended to the summit of the highest mountain in Europe.

Oatlands Park,  
March, 1881.



**J**ACQUES BALMAT was born in the village of Pèlerins, in the commune of Chamonix, in the year 1762. His fore-fathers had long been peasant proprietors, but his tastes differed from theirs; he was endowed with a vivid imagination and with invincible courage, and in order to increase the latter gift he constantly explored the surrounding mountains in search of minerals, for the science of which he had a perfect passion. His audacious courage had made him renowned even amongst his dauntless companions, and his ambition made him thirst to signalize himself by some memorable exploit. He therefore determined to gain the award which De Saussure had promised to the first man who should discover a path

by which the summit of Mont Blanc could be reached. Numerous attempts had been made to attain this object, but hitherto without result.

Let us leave Jacques Balmat to relate his intrepid adventures in his own way, and with his quaint and naive preface to them.

“The determination to reach the summit of Mont Blanc was jogging in my brain night and day. During the day I used to ascend the Brevent, where I passed hours in trying to see a way to my coveted summit. I felt that I should live in a sort of purgatory if I did not succeed, and I could not resist this impulse to go to the Brevent. At night I had hardly closed my eyes when I dreamt that I was on my climb of discovery.” . . . .

We will give but the last of his numerous dreams—it is too characteristic and too delicious to omit. In it he says: “I fixed my nails into the rock that they might act like cramps—I felt I was going to fall—I said to myself: ‘Jacques Balmat my friend, if thou dost not catch hold of that branch above thy head, thine account will



soon be settled.' ”—The accursed branch could only be touched with the tips of my fingers—I raised myself up by my knees like a chimney sweep. Ah that branch! now I clutched at it! I shall never forget that night! my wife awoke me with a great slap . . . imagine! . . . I was sticking fast to her ear all the time, and drawing it out as if it had been a piece of indian rubber! after such an affair as this I said: Jacques Balmat you must now get the right sort of heart in earnest! I thereupon got out of bed and put on my gaiters. ‘Where art thou going?’ said my wife. ‘In search of crystals,’ I replied.—I would not tell her what I was going to do. ‘Do not thou be anxious if thou dost not see me this evening; if I have not returned by nine o’clock I shall sleep on the mountain.’

I took a strong stock with good iron points double the length and thickness of an ordinary one. I filled a gourd with eau-de-vie. I put a morsel of bread in my pocket, and away I started.

I had repeatedly tried to ascend by the “Mer

de glace:" but the *Mont Maudit* had always barred my way. Then I used to return by the *Aiguille du Goûté*; but to ascend from there to the '*Dôme du Goûté*' there is an 'arête' (a backbone of rock) a quarter of a league long, and from one to two feet wide, and below a depth of 1800 feet! This time I was resolved to try another route. I began by the one which leads to the mountain of the '*Côte*;' after three hours ascent, I reached the glacier des Bossons: I crossed it—it was not difficult to do so; four hours later I was at the Grands Mulets—that was something. I had earned my breakfast.—I ate a crust and drank off a cup. So far so good: but one had not then mounted so often to the Grands Mulets as to find a plateau—one was not quite at one's case there, I can assure you. At the end of two hours and a half of research I found a place bare of snow for about six or seven feet—it was here I determined to await the coming day—it was then about 7 o'clock. It was better to stay there than on the snow. I broke off my second crust and drank my second

draught; then I installed myself on the rock where I was going to pass the night. It did not take me long to make my bed. Towards nine o'clock I saw a shadow rise from the valley like a thick smoke; it advanced slowly towards me. At half past nine it reached and enveloped me. Notwithstanding this shroud, I could see above me the last reflected rays of the setting sun which seemed loath to leave the highest point of Mont Blanc. But they did disappear—and with them the day. Turned as I was towards Chamonix; I had, on my left side the immense plain of snow which reaches to the Dôme du Gouté, and on my right—within reach of my hand—a precipice 800 feet deep: I dared not go to sleep for fear of falling outside my bed whilst dreaming. I sat on my bag and stamped my feet and clapped my hands incessantly to keep up the circulation. Soon the moon rose; pale, veiled in a circle of clouds: at eleven I saw a nasty mist cloud coming from the Aiguille de Gouté, which as soon as it reached me smacked me in the face with a dash of snow:—when I had