

Placed at the foot of the Aiguille du Goûter, this station was very happily chosen for so wild a region. The hut was built at the bottom of a rocky angle, about fifty feet above a small glacier which poured forth a rill of translucent water—

“ Fons, splendidior vitro,
Dulci digne mero. non sine floribus ” *—

fit for every want of the travellers. About four feet high, and from seven to eight in length and breadth, this cabin had only three walls; the rock against which it leant formed the fourth. Rude were these walls, consisting of smooth stones superimposed upon one another without the aid of any cement. Exactly similar stones, supported by four trunks of firs, formed the roof of the rough asylum. There was no door, but a simple opening, three feet square, so that one could not enter without almost bending double. An umbrella opened and placed before this opening served as a substitute for a door. The beds consisted of two palliasses provided with woollen coverlets.

It is by the Aiguille du Goûter that Mont Blanc is most easily approached. Our adventurers profited by what remained of daylight to send four guides to climb the mountain, select the easiest route, and mark their steps in the indurated snow.

Some blocks of granite rose about four hundred feet above the mountain-hut. Saussure and his companion hastened to ascend them and enjoy one of the most splendid spectacles which can be witnessed in the Alps. These rocks are quite precipitous on the side of the Chamounix valley, over whose southern extremity they dominate at a height of 5850 feet. The view embraces that portion of the valley bordered by the aiguilles of the Mont Blanc chain, which seem to enclose the great peak in a kind of circus, and which glitter around it like a forest of granite pyramids. On this side the marvellous panorama extends as far as Gemmi. An enormous labyrinth of mountains, which it is impossible to number or distinguish, may be surveyed from the summit of this incomparable observatory.

De Saussure passed an excellent night sheltered in his rustic cabin. When he lifted up the umbrella placed before the opening, he could see from his rude couch the snows, the glaciers, and the peaks beneath in the cold calm moonlight. Illuminated by the rays of the “silver huntress, chaste and fair,” this frozen amphitheatre presented the most singular spectacle.

The guides spent the night in rocky crevices, or enveloped in their mantles or coverlets; a few kept watch around a fire which they fed, very sparingly, with the wood brought from Chamounix.

At six o'clock on the following morning, after having equally apportioned among the guides the burden of provisions, clothes, and instruments, the route was resumed. As the site of the Pierre Ronde proved to be 9050 feet above the sea-level, they had before them an ascent of nearly 6700 feet before the summit of Mont Blanc could be trodden. The greater portion of this traject would be made upon the Aiguille de Goûter, and the remainder upon the snows.

Our travellers crossed in twenty minutes a glacier which separated them from

* [Horace, “Odes,” Book iii., Ode 13.]