

cirque, a sloping rampart ascends towards a broad *port*, or gap, which opens up an access to the head of the mountain.

When Ramond arrived before this slope, there was no snow upon it to facilitate its ascent. Its bare and slippery surface did not offer a solitary point where the foot could rest. Ramond's grapnels would not hold; his iron-shod poles left scarcely a trace. It became necessary to excavate a flight of steps in the ice, between the edges which rose against the rocks, and the centre where the glacier was hollowed out like a gutter, and broken up by innumerable holes and crevices. Between this Scylla and Charybdis a direct incline, growing steeper and steeper, had to be escaladed.

At the end of two hours Ramond and his companions arrived before an impassable ridge, which could only be turned by mounting on the edge of the glacier. But this edge was keen and narrow as the blade of a knife, and separated from the rock by a precipice which descended into the hollow of the glacier. Nevertheless, perilous as was the path, they could find no other.

They hauled themselves up to the edge by a dozen steps cut almost perpendicularly; but before placing foot upon it, sounded it by heavy blows to make sure that it was capable of bearing the weight of several persons. In this manner they achieved, with great difficulty, some thirty steps in twenty minutes, ascending by careful balancing, and in a zigzag line, with the precipice in their rear and on either side.

Then they halted to consult. A few insects crawled along the icy surface. The Green Woodpecker (*Picus viridis*) hovered from rock to rock, as if to mock the enterprise of these daring mortals.

A guide of Baréges, who had led the advance, declared that his head was turning giddy. Ramond was obliged to place him among the others; not an easy thing on a line which, like a line in mathematics, had no breadth.

However, they continued the advance. Twice were they impeded, and their path blocked up by projecting crags. Each man had literally to bend double in order to pass them, and a false step would