

What, then, is a glacier?

The fortunate spectator who could embrace with a bird's-eye view, or from the chariot of some adventurous aeronaut, the whole of the vast Alpine chain, from the shores of the Mediterranean to those of the Adriatic, would behold nearly every shining and silent peak draped in a dazzling robe of ice, which falls over the vast body of each mountain like a kingly shroud, except when broken here and there by the sharp points of rocks too precipitous to retain the descending snows.

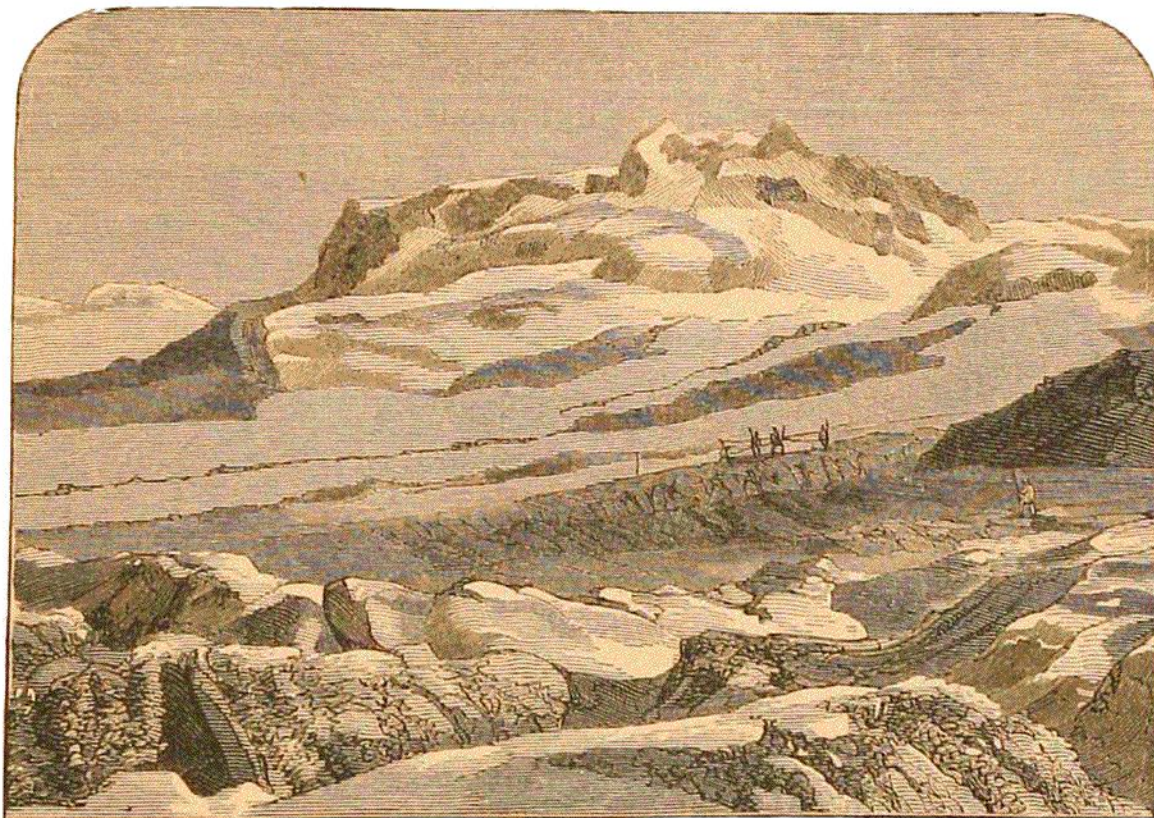


FIG. 97.—THE GLACIERS OF MONTE ROSA.

Beneath, far beneath these towering crests he would mark a labyrinth of narrow valleys, whose inner flanks are rude with furrows of ice, like the fringes or tatters of the silver mantle spread about the summit. He would perceive that these long furrows penetrate to the very heart of the fertile regions which the sons of men call their own. If he removed his gaze from the centre of the Alpine mass, secondary and less important chains, ramifying in every direction, would offer him the same spectacle on a smaller scale. And if his wandering glances descended lower still, he would observe that the ice and