

" Lorsque ce grand courrier de la philosophie,
 Condamine l'observateur,
 De l'Afrique au Pérou, conduit par Uranie,
 Par la gloire et par la manie,
 S'en va griller sous l'équateur,
 Maupertuis et Clairaut, dans leur docte fureur,
 Vont geler au pôle du monde :
 Je les vois d'un degré mesurer la longueur,
 Pour ôter au peuple rimeur
 Ce beau nom de machine ronde,
 Que nos flasques auteurs, en chevillant leurs vers,
 Donnaient à l'aventure à ce plat univers."

[When that great courier of philosophy, Condamine the observer, led by Urania from Africa to Peru, partly inspired by glory and partly by madness, repaired to broil himself under the equator, Maupertuis and Clairaut, in their learned fury, went to freeze at the north pole. I see them measuring the length of a degree, and all to deprive the rhyming race of that beautiful phrase of a round machine, which our feeble authors, while strumming out their verses, bestow haphazard upon the level sphere.]

The North Polar commission, under the orders of Maupertuis, and composed of Clairaut, Camus, and Lemonnier, to whom was added the Abbé Outhier, long a laborious worker at the observatory of Paris, suffered severely from the cold; but were compensated for all inconveniences by the glorious auroras, whose myriad-hued fires illuminate the long nights of those sombre climates. Their return was impatiently expected, and Voltaire wrote :—

" Revole, Maupertuis, de ces déserts glacés
 Où les rayons du jour sont six mois éclipsés;
 Apôtre de Newton, digne appui d'un tel maître,
 Né pour la vérité, viens la faire connaître !
 Héros de la physique, Argonautes nouveaux,
 Qui franchissez les monts, qui traversez les eaux,
 Dont le travail immense et l'exacte mesure
 De la terre étonnée ont fixés la figure."

[Fly back, O Maupertuis, from these frozen deserts, where the solar rays are for six months eclipsed. Apostle of Newton! worthy support of such a master! Born for the service of truth, come thou and make it known! Heroes of physical science, new Argonauts, who cross mountains, traverse seas, and with immense labour and accurate measurement have fixed the shape of the astonished earth!]

It is true that Voltaire, impatient perhaps of a stir and an excitement in which he himself did not share, altered his tone hereafter, and when the success of the Argonauts of the Academy was assured, chanted this palinodia :—

" Vous avez confirmé, dans ces lieux d'ennui,
 Ce que Newton connut sans sortir de chez lui,