of the pure and dazzling whiteness all around, a sight more surprising to the Arctic or the Alpine traveller than would be the realization of all the fabled wonders of the Arabian tales.]

In addition to these inferior organisms, a black insect, known as the Glacier-Louse (*Desoria glacialis*), is also met with on the icy surface of the Alps, lurking in the shelter of crag and stone.

We cannot leave our present subject, the mountain-snows, without some remarks on the terrible natural phenomenon of the *lavanges;** or

AVALANCHES.

What is an Avalanche?

A mass of snow or ice which descends the declivity of lofty mountains, and crashes headlong into the valleys with a roar like that of thunder; overthrowing everything which chances to lie in its path, and dragging down in its tremendous course houses, and forests, and entire villages, so that the scene which previously bloomed like a fairy landscape is suddenly converted into a desolate and silent wilderness. In its disastrous consequences it is frequently second only to an earthquake or volcanic eruption; and of the violence with which nature's hidden forces act, when momentarily released from their normal condition of subjection, it is an extraordinary and a fearful example.

The most formidable avalanches occur in the Alps; a fact which is due to their altitude and configuration, inasmuch as they abound in narrow and confined valleys. There, in their descent, they will often traverse the mountain-side for several thousand yards—a torrent of earth, and rock, and snow, and wood; and falling into the depths of the ravines, they bury everything beneath their ruins, or, blocking up the waters of some stream, provoke an inundation of the lower lands.

The German naturalists, who have carefully studied this formidable phenomenon, distinguish five kinds of avalanches :—

1st, *Snow* or *Mountain Avalanches* (*Schrund-lavinen*), masses of snow which the infiltration of the rain-water or the melting of the snows has loosened from the

* [In German, *Lavinen* or *Lauesinen*.]