

CHAPTER VI

THE Rise of Geological Travel—Pallas, De Saussure.

OF all the physical events that happened in the latter half of the eighteenth century, there was probably none so fruitful in fostering, among the civilized countries of the world, an emulation in discovery and research, as the transit of Venus, which occurred in the summer of 1769. To that event we owe the voyages of Cook, and all the rich harvest of results which they added to our knowledge of the geography of the globe. What England did on the ocean, it was reserved for Russia to rival on the land. The Empress Catherine II. had been irritated by the sarcastic remarks made by a French astronomer who had travelled to Russia to observe the previous transit of Venus in 1763, and she is even said to have been at the trouble of refuting them herself. At all events, she resolved to do without foreign assistance for the second transit. Determined that the work should be done thoroughly, and in such a way as to redound to the glory of her reign, she commissioned the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg to organize the expedition. This undertaking was conceived in a truly imperial spirit. Not only