

To reach the Chapeau one must pass along a narrow ledge, with steps hewn in the face of the steep precipice, known as the Mauvais Pas—the perilous way. The cliff towered hundreds of feet above our head, and sloped to a dizzy depth beneath our feet. This passage was once an exploit of much danger, but iron rods have been bolted into the face of the cliff, so that it is now quite safe. The view of the splintered pinnacles, “seracs,” and ice-tables of the glacier was of wonderful grandeur and beauty.

I stopped for lunch at the auberge shown in the initial cut, and found the place overflowing with a hilarious company of tourists. I joined their party to descend the mountain, entered a huge ice-cave, and got well sprinkled with the falling water. From a vast arch of ice in the glacier leaps forth the river Arveiron in a strong and turbid stream, soon to join the rapid Arve. As we sat gazing on the sight, an American lady quoted with much feeling Coleridge’s sublime hymn to Mount Blanc:

O Sovran Blanc,

The Arve and Arveiron at thy base
Rave ceaselessly ; but thou most awful form,
Risest from forth thy silent sea of pines,
How silently.

Ye ice-falls ! ye that from the mountain’s brow,
Adown enormous ravines slope amain—
Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty Voice,
And stopped at once, amid the maddest plunge.
Motionless torrents ! silent cataracts !
Who made you glorious as the gates of heaven ?
And who commanded (and the silence came)
Here let the billows stiffen and have rest ?

Thou, too, hoar mount, with thy sky-piercing peaks,
All night long visited by troops of stars,
Or while they climb the sky or when they sink ;
Thou kingly spirit throned among the hills,
Thou dread ambassador from earth to heaven—
Great Hierarch ! tell thou the silent sky,
And tell the stars, and tell yon rising sun,
Earth with her thousand voices praises God.

The sublimest aspect of Mount Blanc, I think, is when illumined with the golden glow of sunset. It seems converted into a transparent chrysophrase, burning with an internal fire. But, as the daylight fades, the fire pales to rosy red, and palest pink, and ashen gray, and ghastly white against the darkening sky.