

WHAT ROME WAS BUILT WITH

‘It now remains for us to speak of stones, or in other words, the leading folly of the day; to say nothing at all of our taste for gems and amber, crystal and murrhine vases. For everything of which we have previously treated, down to the present Book, may by some possibility or other have the appearance of having been created for the sake of man; but as to the mountains, Nature has made those for herself as a kind of bulwark for keeping together the bowels of the earth; as also for the purpose of curbing the violence of the rivers, of breaking the waves of the sea, and so, by opposing to them the very hardest of her materials, putting a check upon those elements which are never at rest. And yet we must hew down these mountains forsooth, and carry them off; and this for no other reason than to gratify our luxurious inclinations: heights which in former days it was reckoned a miracle even to have crossed!

‘Our forefathers regarded as a prodigy the passage of the Alps first by Hannibal, and more recently by the Cimbri; but at the present day these very mountains are cut asunder to yield us a thousand different marbles, promontories are thrown open to the sea, and the face of Nature is being everywhere reduced to a level. We now carry away the barriers that were destined for the separation of one nation from another; we construct ships for the transport of our marbles, and amid the waves, the boisterous element of Nature, we convey the summits of the