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The hundred wonders of the world

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Precipices and promontories.

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with the hill on both sides, is solid rock of lime-stone. The arch approaches the semi-elliptical form; but the larger axis of the ellipsis, which would be the cord of the arch, is many times longer than its transverse. Although the sides of this bridge are provided in some parts with a parapet of fixed rocks, yet few persons have sufficient resolution to walk to them, and look over into the abyss. The passenger involuntarily falls on his hands, creeps to the parapet, and peeps over it. Looking down from this height, for the space of a minute, occasions a violent headache. If the view from above be so exquisitely painful as not long to be borne, that from beneath is delightful in the extreme. It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime to be felt in a greater degree than at this spot. The rapture of the spectator cannot be described, when he surveys an arch at once so beautiful, so elevated, and so light, springing up, as it were, to heaven!

This grand natural bridge is in the county of Rock-bridge, to which it has given name, and affords a public and commodious passage over a valley, which cannot be crossed elsewhere for a considerable distance.

PRECIPICES AND PROMONTORIES.

BESSELY GAUT.

THE precipitous pathways which frequently occur in the Indian Appennines, a chain of mountains extending along the Western or Malabar Coasts of the Peninsula, are called GAUTS; and of these abrupt and perpendicular precipices, Bessely Gaut is considered as the most romantic. It is admirably described in the travels of Lord Valentia, from which the following particulars are extracted.

On entering the defiles of the chain of mountains by which the table-land of Mysore is separated from the low country of Canara and Malabar, the scenery becomes extremely wild and romantic. Having reached Purneah Chuttoor, situated on the summit of this celebrated Gaut, his lordship began his descent at three in the morning, by a road formed with great labour out of a bed of loose rock, over which the torrents of the preceding winter had

run with such force, as to wash away all the softer parts, and in several places to leave single rocks, of four or five feet diameter, standing in the centre of the road, and not more than two feet asunder. He alighted from his palanquin to admire the sublimity of the scene, and entered a forest of the largest Oriental trees, several of which were one hundred feet in the stem before a single branch extended itself, notwithstanding which, the descent was so steep, that he was frequently on a level with their tops, at so small a distance as to be able to distinguish them, by the gleam of the numerous torches by which his party was accompanied, but which were insufficient to enlighten the impenetrable canopy of foliage which for miles concealed the face of heaven, or the deep gloom of the abyss into which he appeared to descend. In the day-time the scene could not have been half so awful or magnificent. The descent was impeded by numerous droves of oxen which were ascending the Gaut.

At break of day an opening, in a winding part of the road, displayed the lofty mountain the party had descended, covered with forests nearly to its summit. They passed several rivulets, which at one spot had united, and formed a small stream. The surrounding vegetation was richly variegated; and the branches of the loftiest trees covered by plants of the parasitical tribe. The inhabitants of a small village, in the centre of this immense forest, were employed in thrashing their grain in a truly patriarchal manner: on a floor of hard earth the grain was trodden out by oxen, which, agreeably to the Mosaical law, were unmuzzled.

THE CAPE OF THE WINDS.

THE fortress of Mankoop, in the Crimea, is of a very extraordinary magnitude, and may be described as being literally stationed in the clouds. It covers the summit of a semicircular insulated mountain, which, from its frightful aspect, its altitude, and craggy perpendicular sides, independently of every other consideration than as a surprising work of nature, fills the mind with wonder on entering the defile. In this singular situation, where there are not any visible means of ascent towards the height, and still less

of conveying the necessary materials for the completion of so astonishing a work, the Genoese constructed this citadel, perhaps without a parallel in Europe, the result of their wealth, address, and enterprise. Being at a remote distance from the coast, it is natural to conjecture that it was employed to curb the hostile spirit of the natives towards the maritime colonial possessions. The latest possessors of this fortress were Jews, in the cemetery of whose colony the traveller meets with ruined tombs of marble and stone, lying beneath the trees he has to pass in his ascent.

The whole of the passage up the mountain is steep and difficult; nor is it rendered more practicable by the amazing labours of its original possessors, whose dilapidated works occur almost at every step. On reaching the summit, caverns and gloomy galleries, perforated in the rock, present on every side their dark mouths. On the most elevated part of this extraordinary eminence, is a beautiful plain, covered with fine turf: it is partly fenced in by the mouldering wall of the fortress, but otherwise open to the surrounding precipices. From this spot the adjacent mountains, valleys, hills, woods, and villages, may be discerned. "While," observes the traveller, by whom these details are supplied, "with dismay and caution we crept on our hands and knees to look over the brink of these fearful heights, a half-clad Tartar, wild as the winds of the north, mounted, without a saddle, and without any other bridle except the twisted stem of a wild vine, on a colt equally unsubdued, galloped to the very edge of the precipice, where, as his horse stood prancing on the borders of eternity, he amused himself with pointing out to us the different places in the vast district which the eye commanded. We entered one of the excavated chambers,—a small square apartment, which led to another on our right-hand; and, on our left, a narrow passage conducted us to an open balcony, with a parapet in front, formed of the rock, on the very face of one of the principal precipices, whence the depth below might be contemplated with less danger. The vultures which hovered over the valleys did not appear larger than swallows; and the tops of the hills, covered by tufted woods, with the villages scattered amid the rocks and defiles, appeared at so intimidating a depth, that the blood chilled at the view. At

length, being conducted to the north-eastern point of the crescent, that being the shape of the summit on which the fortress of Mankoop was built, and descending a few stone steps, neatly hewn out in the rock, we entered by a square door the cavern, called by the Tartars THE CAPE OF THE WINDS. It has been chiselled, like the rest, out of the solid stone; but is open on four sides. From the amazing prospect here commanded of all the surrounding country, it probably served as a post of military observation. The apertures, or windows, are large arched chasms in the rock: through these, a most extensive range of scenery over the distant mountains and rolling clouds forms a sublime spectacle. There is nothing in any part of Europe to surpass the tremendous grandeur of the place. Beneath the cavern is another chamber leading to the several cells on its different sides: these have all been cut out of the same rock."

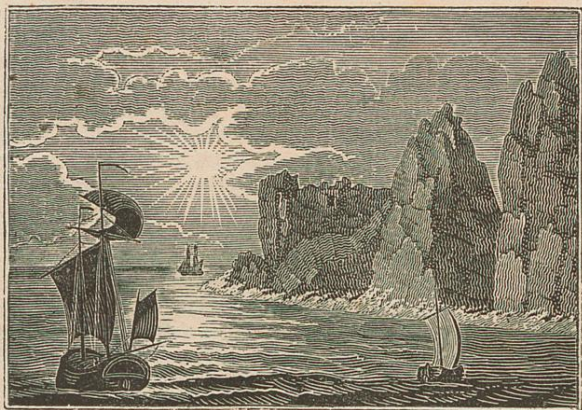
The party, in descending, pursued a different route, which, if they had taken in their ascent, would, our traveller observes, have afforded them a view of the sublimest scenery imaginable. They now passed beneath an old arched gate-way of the citadel, once its principal entrance. This road flanks the northern side of the mountain; and the fall into the valley is so bold and profound, that a single false step would precipitate both horse and rider. By alighting, the danger is avoided; and the terror of the descent compensated by the noblest scenery the eye ever beheld. It was dark before they reached the bottom; and they had some difficulty to regain the principal road which leads through the defile, owing principally to the trees which project over all the lanes in the vicinity of Tartar villages, and so effectually obstruct the passage of persons on horseback, that they were in continual danger of being thrown. The defile itself is not without danger in certain seasons of the year, immense masses of limestones detaching themselves from the rocks above, and carrying all before them in their descent. Several of these masses, detached from the northern precipices, had crossed the river at the bottom, and, by the prodigious velocity acquired in their descent, had actually rolled nearly half-way up the opposite side.

THE NORTH CAPE.

THIS Cape forms the most northerly point of the Continent of Europe, and may be regarded as one of the sublimest wonders of nature. It is situated within the arctic circle, in seventy-one degrees ten minutes north latitude. It has been accurately described by a late voyager, from whose account the following particulars are extracted.

In approaching the Cape, a little before midnight, its rocks at first appeared to be nearly of an equal height, until they terminated in a perpendicular peak; but, on a nearer view, those within were found to be much higher than those of the extreme peak, or point. Their general appearance was highly picturesque. The sea, breaking against this immovable rampart, which had withstood its fury from the remotest ages, bellowed, and formed a thick border of white froth. This spectacle, equally beautiful and terrific, was illumined by the MIDNIGHT SUN; and the shade which covered the western side of the rocks rendered their aspect still more tremendous. The height of these rocks could not be ascertained; but here every thing was on so grand a scale, that a point of comparison could not be afforded by any ordinary known objects.

On landing, the party discovered a grotto, formed of rocks, the surface of which had been washed smooth by the waves, and having within a spring of fresh water. The only accessible spot in the vicinity was a hill, some hundred paces in circumference, surrounded by enormous crags. From the summit of this hill, turning towards the sea, they perceived to the right a prodigious mountain, attached to the Cape, and rearing its sterile mass to the skies. To the left, a neck of land, covered with less elevated rocks, against which the surges dashed with violence, closed the bay, and admitted but a limited view of the ocean. To see as far as possible into the interior, our navigators climbed almost to the summit of the mountain, where a most singular landscape presented itself to the view. A lake in the foreground had an elevation of at least ninety feet above the level of the sea; and on the top of an adjacent, but less lofty mountain, was another lake. The



North Cape at Midnight.



Ice Islands and Continent of Ice, in the North Polar Circle.



view was terminated by peaked rocks, chequered by patches of snow.

At midnight the sun still remained several degrees above the horizon, and continued to ascend higher and higher till noon, when, having again descended, it passed the north, without dipping below the horizon. This phenomenon, which is as extraordinary to the inhabitants of the torrid and temperate zones, as snow is to the inhabitants of the torrid zone, could not be viewed without a particular interest. Two months of continued day-light, during which space the sun never sets, seem to place the traveller in a new state of existence; while the effect on the inhabitants of these regions is singular. During the time the sun is perpetually above the horizon, they rise at ten in the morning, dine at five or six in the evening, and go to bed at one. But, during the winter season, when, from the beginning of December until the end of January, the sun never rises, they sleep above half of the twenty-four hours, and employ the other half in sitting over the fire, all business being at an end, and a constant darkness prevailing.

The cause of this phenomenon, as it affects the northern and southern regions of the earth, may be readily understood. The sun always illumines half the earth at once, and shines on every side ninety degrees from the place where he is vertical. When he is vertical over the equator, or equidistant from both poles, he shines as far as each pole; and this happens in spring and autumn. But, as he declines to the north in summer, he shines beyond the north pole, and all the countries near that pole turn round in perpetual sunshine: he, at the same time, leaves the south pole an equal number of degrees, and those parts turn round in darkness. The effect is contrary at each pole in our winter, the sun then declining southward or the equator.

About three miles from the North Cape lies Masö, the northernmost port of Norwegian Lapland. It is formed of a very fine bay, in which ships may winter with the greatest security.

PRECIPICES OF SAN ANTONIA.

THE mountain of San Antonia, on the route from Guayaquil to Quito, is described by Ulloa as presenting a series of the most fearful precipices. In crossing this mountain, the declivity was in some parts so great, that the mules could not have kept their footing, had not the paths been filled with holes, upwards of two feet in depth, in which the mules placed their fore and hinder feet, occasionally dragging their bellies, and the legs of the rider, along the ground. Without these holes, which serve as steps, the precipices would not be practicable. Should the creature happen, however, to place his foot between two of these holes, or to falter in the slightest degree, the rider would fall, and perish inevitably. To lessen the difficulties and dangers of these craggy paths, the Indians, who go before the travellers, dig small trenches across.

The descent from the heights was a task of imminent danger. Owing to the excessive steepness, the water had washed away the greater part of the holes; while, on the one side were steep eminences, and on the other, the most frightful abysses. The mules were themselves sensible of the caution requisite in descending; for, on reaching the top of an eminence, they stopped, and having placed their fore feet close together, as in a posture of stopping themselves, they also placed their hinder feet together but a little forwards, as if going to lie down. In this attitude, having, as it were, taken a survey of the road, they slid down with the swiftness of a meteor. All the rider had to do, was to keep himself fast in his saddle, without checking his beast; as the least motion would have been sufficient to destroy its equilibrium, and both would have inevitably perished. The address of the creatures was truly wonderful, for, in this rapid motion, when they seemed to have lost all government of themselves, they followed exactly the different windings of the road, as if they had previously reconnoitered, and settled in their minds the route they were to follow, and taken every precaution for their safety, amid so many irregularities. The safety of the rider depended entirely on their experience and address.

but, long as they had been accustomed to travel these roads, they still felt a degree of horror on reaching the top of a steep declivity. Without being checked by their rider, they stopped; and if he inadvertently endeavoured to spur them on, they were immovable until they had placed themselves in a secure posture. They seemed truly to be actuated by reason; for they not only viewed the road attentively, but trembled and snorted at the danger—emotions which inspired the party with the most dreadful apprehensions. The Indians went before, and, placing themselves along the sides of the mountain, where they held by the roots of trees, animated the beasts with shouts, until they at once started down the declivity.

There were some parts where the declivities were not on the side of precipices; but the road was so narrow and hollow, and the sides nearly perpendicular, that the danger was almost equal. The track being extremely narrow, with scarcely a sufficient width of road to admit the mule with its rider, if the former had fallen, the latter would necessarily have been crushed, and, for want of room to disengage himself, would have been mutilated in his limbs, if he had escaped with life. It was truly wonderful to consider with what exactness these animals, after having overcome the first emotions of their fear, and when they were going to slide down the declivity, stretched out their fore-legs, to the end that they might preserve their equilibrium. The gentle inclination they made with the body, at a proper distance, in following the several windings of the road, was also a mark of surprising sagacity; and, lastly, their address in stopping themselves at the end of the impetuous career, was truly deserving of observation. Greater prudence and conduct could not have been exhibited by man!

PRECIPICE OF THE TABLE MOUNTAIN,
SOUTH CAROLINA.

THE Table Mountain, situated in Pendleton District, in South Carolina, presents an awful precipice of nine hundred feet. Few persons who have once cast a glimpse into the almost boundless abyss beneath, can again exercise sufficient fortitude to approach the margin of the chasm.

Almost every one, on looking over, involuntarily falls to the ground, senseless, nerveless, and helpless; and would inevitably be precipitated, and dashed to atoms, were it not for measures of caution and security, that have always been deemed indispensable to a safe indulgence of the curiosity of the visitor or spectator. Every one, on proceeding to the spot, whence it is usual to gaze over the wonderful deep, has, in his imagination, a limit or bound, graduated by a reference to distances with which his eye has been familiar. But in a moment, eternity, as it were, is presented to his astounded senses; and he is instantly overwhelmed: his whole system is no longer subject to his volition or his reason, and he falls like a mass of lead, obedient only to the common laws of mere matter. He then revives, and, in wild delirium, surveys a scene which, for a while, he is unable to define by description or limitation.

GEOLOGICAL CHANGES OF THE EARTH.

There are more things in heaven and earth
Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE variety of fossil substances, many of them marine productions, which are found in mountains remote from the sea, are undeniable proofs that the earth's surface has undergone considerable changes, some of which indicate an alteration of climate not easily to be explained. The remains of animals inhabiting hot countries, and the marine productions of hot climates, which are frequently found in high northern latitudes, lead to a suspicion that the earth's axis was at a very remote period differently inclined to what it is at present. The tropics now extend twenty-three degrees and a half on each side the equator; but if they were extended to forty-five degrees, then the arctic circle and the tropics would coincide, and thence would arise inconceivable variations in the productions and phenomena of the earth. All this would form an amusing speculation to a person possessed of a terrestrial globe, who might tie a thread round it to represent the tropics at forty-five degrees of elevation.