

readily than with men of science. It was thus that he gained that detailed personal acquaintance with the surface of France with which he enriched his writings."

During these journeyings, he was led into Auvergne in the year 1763, where, eleven years after Guettard's description had been presented to the Academy, he found himself in the same tract of Central France, wandering over the same lava-fields, from Volvic to the heights of Mont Dore. Among the many puzzles reported by the mineralogists of his day, none seems to have excited his interest more than that presented by the black columnar stone which was found in various parts of Europe, and for which Agricola, writing in the middle of the sixteenth century, had revived Pliny's old name of "basalt." The wonderful symmetry, combined with the infinite variety of the pillars, the vast size to which they reached, the colossal cliffs along which they were ranged in admirable regularity, had vividly aroused the curiosity of those who concerned themselves with the nature and origin of minerals and rocks. Desmarest had read all that he could find about this mysterious stone. He cast longing eyes towards the foreign countries where it was developed. In particular, he pictured to himself the marvels of the Giant's Causeway of the north of Ireland, as one of the most remarkable natural monuments of the world, where Nature had traced her operations with a bold hand, but had left the explanation of them still concealed from mortal ken. How fain would he have directed his steps to that distant shore. Little did he dream