

those vast plains which uninterruptedly extend to the Atlantic Ocean can be seen. We descended to the upper limit of vegetation, and found good quarters for the night under the shelter of some large fragments of rock. We met here some passengers, who made anxious inquiries about the state of the road. Shortly after it was dark the clouds suddenly cleared away, and the effect was quite magical. The great mountains, bright with the full moon, seemed impending over us on all sides, as over a deep crevice: one morning, very early, I witnessed the same striking effect. As soon as the clouds were dispersed it froze severely; but as there was no wind, we slept very comfortably.

The increased brilliancy of the moon and stars at this elevation, owing to the perfect transparency of the atmosphere, was very remarkable. Travellers having observed the difficulty of judging heights and distances amid lofty mountains, have generally attributed it to the absence of objects of comparison. It appears to me that it is fully as much owing to the transparency of the air confounding objects at different distances, and likewise partly to the novelty of an unusual degree of fatigue arising from a little exertion—habit being thus opposed to the evidence of the senses. I am sure that this extreme clearness of the air gives a peculiar character to the landscape, all objects appearing to be brought nearly into one plane, as in a drawing or panorama. The transparency is, I presume, owing to the equable and high state of atmospheric dryness. This dryness was shown by the manner in which woodwork shrank (as I soon found by the trouble my geological hammer gave me); by articles of food, such as bread and sugar, becoming extremely hard; and by the preservation of the skin and parts of the flesh of the beasts which had perished on the road. To the same cause we must attribute the singular facility with which electricity is excited. My flannel waistcoat, when rubbed in the dark, appeared as if it had been washed with phosphorus; every hair on a dog's back crackled; even the linen sheets, and leathern straps of the saddle, when handled, emitted sparks.