

account of the snowdrifts. They are eight in number, and under the Spanish government were kept during the winter well stored with food and charcoal, and each courier had a master-key. Now they only answer the purpose of caves, or rather dungeons. Seated on some little eminence, they are not, however, ill suited to the surrounding scene of desolation. The zigzag ascent of the Cumbre, or the partition of the waters, was very steep and tedious; its height, according to Mr. Pentland, is 12,454 feet. The road did not pass over any perpetual snow, although there were patches of it on both hands. The wind on the summit was exceedingly cold, but it was impossible not to stop for a few minutes to admire, again and again, the color of the heavens, and the brilliant transparency of the atmosphere. The scenery was grand: to the westward there was a fine chaos of mountains, divided by profound ravines. Some snow generally falls before this period of the season, and it has even happened that the Cordillera have been finally closed by this time. But we were most fortunate. The sky, by night and by day, was cloudless, excepting a few round little masses of vapor that floated over the highest pinnacles. I have often seen these islets in the sky, marking the position of the Cordillera, when the far-distant mountains have been hidden beneath the horizon.

April 6th.—In the morning we found some thief had stolen one of our mules, and the bell of the *madrina*. We therefore rode only two or three miles down the valley, and stayed there the ensuing day in hopes of recovering the mule, which the *arriero* thought had been hidden in some ravine. The scenery in this part had assumed a Chilean character: the lower sides of the mountains, dotted over with the pale evergreen *Quillay* tree, and with the great chandelier-like cactus, are certainly more to be admired than the bare eastern valleys; but I cannot quite agree with the admiration expressed by some travellers. The extreme pleasure, I suspect, is chiefly owing to the prospect of a good fire and of a good supper, after escaping from the cold regions.