

by thick clouds, drifted by a cold and rough wind. Rapid slopes, covered with yellow and dry grass, now seen in shade, and now suddenly illumined, seemed like precipices, the depth of which the eye sought in vain to measure. We proceeded onwards, in single file, and endeavoured to support ourselves by our hands, lest we should roll down. The guides, who carried our instruments, abandoned us successively, to sleep on the mountain. Among those who remained with us was a Congo black, who evinced great address, bearing on his head a large dipping-needle: he held it constantly steady, notwithstanding the extreme declivity of the rocks. The fog had dispersed by degrees in the bottom of the valley; and the scattered lights we perceived below us caused a double illusion. The steeps appeared still more dangerous than they really were; and, during six hours of continual descent, we seemed to be always equally near the farms at the foot of the Silla. We heard very distinctly the voices of men and the notes of guitars. Sound is generally so well propagated upwards, that in a balloon at the elevation of three thousand toises, the barking of dogs is sometimes heard.*

We did not arrive till ten at night at the bottom of the valley. We were overcome with fatigue and thirst, having walked for fifteen hours, nearly without stopping. The soles of our feet were cut and torn by the asperities of a rocky soil and the hard and dry stalks of the gramina, for we had been obliged to pull off our boots, the soles having become too slippery. On declivities devoid of shrubs or ligneous herbs, which may be grasped by the hand, the danger of the descent is diminished by walking barefoot. In order to shorten the way, our guides conducted us from the Puerta de la Silla to the farm of Gallegos by a path leading to a reservoir of water, called el Tanque. They missed their way, however; and this last descent, the steepest of all, brought us near the ravine of Chacaito. The noise of the cascades gave this nocturnal scene a grand and wild character.

We passed the night at the foot of the Silla. Our friends at Caracas had been able to distinguish us with glasses on

* Gay-Lussac's account of his ascent on the 15th of September, 1805.