

This same cause, absorption, may influence the colour of clouds by the abstraction of a portion or the entire of one or more constituent rays. Atmospheric vapour may be variously constituted, and its effects on light may be different, according to its character and mode of combination ; thus, one cloud may absorb the blue, and another the red rays, or such proportions of each may be successively taken away as shall produce a rapid and evanescent series of resplendent colours. It is scarcely possible to determine what those changes of constitution may be which assist in the production of all that variety of colouring and blending of shades which distinguish clouds ; but whatever may be the source of those changes which pass over the vapour itself, its action upon light may be traced to absorption.

The position of clouds in relation to the sun has no small influence in occasioning those rapid changes of form and colour for which they are remarkable. It is scarcely possible to imagine that the clouds, which at sunset may be absolutely drenched in golden hues, have before floated over the hemisphere as colourless and flaccid masses ; yet we cannot watch a mass of vapour over the face of the heavenly vault, without observing the infinite variety of colours and shades which it assumes, as fickle, and frequently not less vivid, than the hues of the celestial bow.

The cirro-stratus is often marked with rich and even splendid colouring ; its crimsons, purples, and scarlets, are such as art cannot imitate. Mr. Howard describes the appearance of the sky at one time as being covered with cirri passing to cirro-stratus, the whole hemisphere being tinged with varied but most beautiful hues. We shall not readily forget the appearance of the same modification viewed from a mountain summit on a summer evening. The broad mass of cloud was as though died with the deepest crimson, while the cirri pencilled upon the meridian graduated from a light red to a deep blue.

RAINBOW.

Of all the natural appearances dependent on the action and conditions of light, the rainbow is the most beautiful and the most striking. Maurolycus, Baptista Porta, and Antonio de Dominis, made observations upon it, and attempt-