

broken up and thrown into all kinds of disorder by masses of porphyry of every shade of color, from dark brown to the brightest lilac. It was the first view I ever saw which really resembled those pretty sections which geologists make of the inside of the earth.

The next day we crossed the plain, and followed the course of the same great mountain stream which flows by Luxan. Here it was a furious torrent, quite impassable, and appeared larger than in the low country, as was the case with the rivulet of Villa Vicencio. On the evening of the succeeding day we reached the Rio de las Vacas, which is considered the worst stream in the Cordillera to cross. As all these rivers have a rapid and short course, and are formed by the melting of the snow, the hour of the day makes a considerable difference in their volume. In the evening the stream is muddy and full, but about daybreak it becomes clearer and much less impetuous. This we found to be the case with the Rio Vacas, and in the morning we crossed it with little difficulty.

The scenery thus far was very uninteresting, compared with that of the Portillo pass. Little can be seen beyond the bare walls of the one grand, flat-bottomed valley, which the road follows up to the highest crest. The valley and the huge rocky mountains are extremely barren: during the two previous nights the poor mules had absolutely nothing to eat, for, excepting a few low resinous bushes, scarcely a plant can be seen. In the course of this day we crossed some of the worst passes in the Cordillera, but their danger has been much exaggerated. I was told that if I attempted to pass on foot, my head would turn giddy, and that there was no room to dismount; but I did not see a place where any one might not have walked over backward, or got off his mule on either side. One of the bad passes, called *las Animas* (the Souls), I had crossed, and did not find out till a day afterward that it was one of the awful dangers. No doubt there are many parts in which, if the mule should stumble, the rider would be hurled down a great precipice; but of