

The herbaceous vegetation nourished by the meagre soil ceased at about 950 feet above the lake Yana-Concha. Thenceforth nothing but sombre walls of rocks reared upon foundations of eternal snow. At certain points these rocks arranged themselves in masses of slender and irregular columns, which from afar produced all the effect of a forest of trees, dead, but still standing.

This avenue of black trunks led directly to a very narrow ridge; the only road by which the summit could be obtained, for the snow lying on the other parts of the mountain was too recent and too soft to bear the weight of a single pedestrian. The ridge narrowing as it ascended, offered but a perilous path, and the incline grew steeper and yet steeper. At the elevation of 16,600 feet all the guides abandoned the enterprise, daunted by its difficulties, and only one native, a half-breed of San Juan, remained faithful to the travellers.

Despite the fog which surrounded them, they mounted to a greater altitude than they had hoped for, though not without incurring the most alarming dangers. The ridge (*cuchilla*, or knife-back, to adopt the expressive word of the Spaniards) along which they fared was only from eight to twelve inches (25 to 30 centimetres) in width. It terminated, on the left, in an inclined plane of thirty degrees, formed of congealed snow which glittered like a mirror; on the right yawned an abyss, nearly 1000 feet in depth, wherein the sharp rocks rise vertically like spires or pinnacles. "We moved forward, however," says Humboldt, "leaning ourselves on this side; the peril appeared to us far more formidable on the left, because we had not there even the slight resource of clinging to the projections of the rock, and the sloping stratum of ice would not have saved us from being buried in the snow."

The difficulty of ascent continued, nevertheless, to increase. The rock became more and more friable, and the incline so steep that the travellers were fain to crawl on their hands and feet, at the risk of wounding themselves every moment. They advanced in single file, exploring the path before them at every step, for frequently the huge stones which seemed a compact portion of the soil became detached, and rolled from under the foot instead of serving it for a support.

To ascertain the altitude at which they had arrived, Humboldt halted on a point of the ridge where two persons could scarcely stand side by side: observation of the barometer showed that they were then 18,500 feet above the sea. The temperature of the atmosphere was 39° Fahrenheit; the ground was very damp, and a dense fog constantly enshrouded the travellers during the hour which they occupied in climbing the terrible *cuchilla*.

Everybody then began to feel *le mal des montagnes*—that is, a desire to vomit, and a kind of vertigo. The native who had agreed to share the fatigues of the ascent suffered far more than the European travellers. All bled from the gums and lips, and their eyes were terribly bloodshot. Similar inconveniences were experienced by De Saussure, and have been felt by all mountain-climbers. But while these phenomena manifested themselves on Mont Blanc at an elevation of only 9000 feet, on Chimborazo they did not become visible except at 18,500 feet. In fact, the *mal des montagnes* varies according to the country and the individual. Many persons suffer from it at less than 14,000 feet. The symptoms, moreover, differ according to the age and constitution of the sufferer, and are aggravated by the muscular effort