

saturated. This hygrometrical condition of the atmosphere on the summits of lofty mountains is fatal to the supposition that the dryness of the skin of the face, so frequently experienced by the climber, can be owing to the dryness of the air. We must rather attribute the accident to the action of the very strong light reflected by the ice and snow. Consequently it may be prevented by covering the face with coloured crape, or even by blackening it. On the glaciers a negro's skin never suffers from the sun.

The mist which had enshrouded the travellers finally cleared away, revealing on their right a horrible abyss, and on the left a projecting rock, which formed a kind of belvedere or observatory. With the assistance of his companions, Boussingault contrived to climb it. Looking around, he ascertained that it was possible to ascend much higher if they succeeded in scaling a slope of frozen snow which was supported against the opposite side of the Red Rock. He ordered the negro to test the strength of the snow; fortunately it proved of sufficient density to bear them all. Colonel Hall and the negro then passed round the belvedere rock, and Boussingault rejoined them by sliding along its icy incline.

As they prepared to attempt the escalade, a stone from the upper part of the mountain fell suddenly at the feet of the colonel, who was thrown down by the shock; but he sprang up immediately to examine the rocky specimen so roughly submitted to his investigation; it proved to be a block of trachyte.

"We now walked with the greatest caution," says Boussingault; "on the right, we were able to support ourselves against the crag; on the left, the declivity was frightful, and before advancing further we began to familiarize ourselves completely with the precipice. This is a precaution which in mountaineering should not be neglected, whenever a dangerous place has to be passed. The advice was given by Saussure long ago, but it cannot be too frequently repeated, and in my adventurous wanderings among the Alps I have never lost sight of the prudent precept." *

At this stage of the journey everybody began to feel the effects of the rarefaction of the air. Every moment they were compelled to pause, and frequently to prostrate themselves on the ground for a few seconds; but the suffering ceased when they were at rest. A fact which was also noted by Saussure.

Suddenly a new danger was added to their previous trials; the soft snow was no longer more than three or four inches deep; beneath it lay a hard slippery ice, and to cross it without falling they were compelled to cut holes for their feet. For this purpose the negro went foremost; but his strength was soon exhausted. Boussingault endeavouring to pass him, and take his place, slipped on the very edge of the precipice. Very fortunately his two companions caught hold of him, and held him suspended. All three incurred the greatest danger; but having succeeded in recovering their equilibrium, they bravely resumed their progress along the perilous path. By a last effort they succeeded in reaching, at three-quarters past one P.M., the end of this most formidable ridge.

It proved impossible, however, to advance beyond. They found themselves at the foot of an enormous trachytic rampart, whose upper portion, shrouded in eternal

* Humboldt, "Mélanges de Géologie et de Physique," p. 199.