

DESCRIPTIVE

The Cedars of Lebanon.

As we entered the last defile the minstrels and singers of the caravan commenced a psalm. Altars fumed from various points of the chasm above; and Syrian priests were seen in their robes performing the empty rites of idolatry. I turned away from this perversion of human reason, and passed forward through the lingering multitude, until the forest rose in its majesty before me. My step was checked in solemn admiration. I saw the earliest produce of the earth—the patriarchs of the reviving globe had sat beneath these green and lovely arches; the final generation was to sit beneath them. No roof so noble ever rose above the heads of monarchs, though it were covered with gold and diamonds. The forest had been greatly impaired in extent and beauty, by the sacrilegious hand of war. The perpetual conflicts of the Syrian and Egyptian dynasties laid the axe to it with remorseless violation. It once spread over the whole range of the mountains its diminished strength now, like the relics of a mighty army, made it stand among the central fortresses of its native region; and there majestically bade defiance to the farther assault of steel and fire. The forms of the trees seemed made for duration; the trunks were of prodigious thickness, smooth and round as pillars of marble, some rising to a great height, and throwing out a level roof of foliage, some dividing into a cluster of trunks, and with various heights of branch and leaf, making a succession of verdurous caves; some propagating themselves by circles of young cedars, risen where the fruit had dropped upon the ground; the whole bore the aspect of a colossal temple of nature—the shafted column, the deep arch, the solid buttresses branching off into the richest caprices of oriental architecture, the solemn roof high above, pale, yet painted by the strong sunlight through the leaves with transparent and tessellated dyes, rich as the color of the Indian mines. In the momentary feeling of awe and wonder, I could comprehend why paganism loved to worship under the shade of forests; and why the poets of paganism filled the shade with the attributes and presence of deities. The airy whisperings, the loneliness, the rich twilight were the food of mystery. Even the forms that towered before the eyes, these ancient trees, the survivors of the general law of mortality gigantic, hoary, covered with their weedy robes, bowing their heads in the blast and uttering strange sounds and groanings in the struggle, gave to the high wrought supersession of the soul, the image of things unearthly, the oracle and the God! Or was this impression but the obscure revival of one of those lovely truths that shone upon the days of paradise, when man drew knowledge from its fountain nature; and all but his own passions were disclosed to the first born of creation!—*Salathiel*.

THE MASCAL PLANT.—This extraordinary vegetable production, (a description of which has never been published) is only to be found on the Rio Grande, and its tributary streams, N. W. of the Mexican republic—it grows spontaneously on the most barren and sterile mountains in that country, & is as much esteemed as an article of food by the Mexican Indians as is the Buffalo, the Elk, and the Deer, by their more Northern neighbors. The Mascal grows in the shape of a cabbage head, & may be found as large in size as half a barrel; it is thickly covered with sharp prickly protuberances to the length of from twelve to eighteen inches, the root is very small, the head has also a thick covering of leaves, much resembling in shape, those of the Plantain tree, which are very juicy, and when prepared for eating in the same manner as the head, affords a sweet, and nutritious beverage, answering every purpose to allay thirst.

The process used for cooking this plant is very singular, yet if digressed from in a single instance, the Mascal is spoiled and rendered unfit for use; it consists of digging a hole or pit in the ground to the depth of four or five feet, which must be covered with a layer of heated rocks, on which the Mascal is placed with the root downward; a thick coat of leaves and bushes must be thrown over the mouth of the the pit, over all of which is to be lain a thin coat of dirt sufficient to prevent the heat or steam from escaping. In this situation must the Mascal remain (according to Indian computation) for three days and three nights, when it may be taken out, and will be found perfectly cooked, and most delicious food. In flavour it resembles a ripe mellow peach, each succeeding day adding to its qualities; it increases in excellence by age. On this plant alone do the Indians subsist for months being perfectly satisfied with their food, and esteeming it above all other. About half a pound of Mascal is by them deemed sufficient to satisfy the cravings of hum

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