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ASTRONOMY.

THE RAINBOW.

[The following reflections on this phenomenon are extracted from a work of considerable talent. Mr Burke's Beauties, Harmonies, and Sublimities of Nature.]

The poets feigned the rainbow to be the residence of certain aerial creatures, whose delight it is to wander in the clouds. Milton, in his exquisite pastoral drama, thus alludes to this Platonic idea—

I took it for a fairy vision
Of some gay creature in the element
That in the colours of the rainbow live,
And play i' th' plighted clouds.

The rainbow, which, not improbably, first suggested the idea of arches, though beautiful in all countries, is more particularly so in mountainous ones; for, independent of their frequency, it is impossible to conceive any arch more grand (if we except the double ring of Saturn) than when its extreme points rest upon the opposite sides of a wide valley, or on the peaked summits of precipitate mountains.

One of the glories which are said to surround the throne of heaven is a rainbow like an emerald. In the Apocalypse it is described as encircling the head of an angel; in Ezekiel, four cherubim are compared to a cloud, arched with it; and nothing, out of the Hebrew scriptures, can exceed the beauty of that passage in Milton, where he describes its creation and its first appearance.

There is a picture representing this emblem of mercy, so admirably painted, in the east of Ambras, in the circle of Austria, that the grand duke of Tuscany offered a hundred thousand crowns for it. Rubens frequently gave animation to pictures, which had little beside to interest the eye of the spectator, by painting this phenomenon—one of Guido's best pieces represents the Virgin and Infant sitting on a rainbow, and round the niche in which stood a statue of the Virgin in the chapel of Loreto, were imbedded precious stones of

various lustres, forming a rainbow of various colours.

The rainbows of Greenland are frequently of a pale white, fringed with a brownish yellow—arising from the rays of the sun being reflected from a frozen cloud. In Iceland it is called the Bridge of the Gods—and the Scandinavians gave it for a guardian a being called Heindler. They supposed it to connect heaven with earth. Ulma and Hougner describe circular rainbows, which are frequently seen on the mountains, rising above Quito, in the kingdom of Peru, while Edward asserts, that a rainbow was seen near London, caused by the exhalations of that city, after the sun had set more than twenty minutes. A naval friend, too, informs me, that as he was one day watching the sun's effect upon the exhalations, near Juan Fernandez, he saw upwards of five and twenty iris combine at the same time. In these marine-bows the concave sides were turned upwards—the drops of water rising from below, and not falling from above, as in the instances of aerial arches. They are sometimes formed also, by waves dashing against the rocks, as may frequently be seen on the coast of Carnarvon, Merioneth, Pembroke, Cardigan, and Carmarthen.

In some rainbows may be discovered three arches within the purple of the common bow—1. yellowish green, darker green, purple—2. green, purple—3. green, purple. Rainbows, too, are sometimes seen when the hoar frost is descending; and Captain Perry, in his attempts to reach the North Pole by boats and sledges saw a fog bow, and no less than five arches formed within the main one, beautifully coloured.

Aristotle states, that he was the first who ever saw a lunar rainbow—he saw only two in fifty years. He assuredly means he was the first who ever described one, since lunar rainbows must have been observed in all ages. That it was unknown to St. Ambrose, however, is evident, from his saying that the bow,