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TRAVELS.

ASCENT OF MOUNT ETNA.

(Continued from page 379.)

For several miles down the mountain, not a tree, a shrub, or a herb is anywhere to be seen—nothing but the black cinders. The nearest vegetation is out of the reach of sound and at such a distance that the eye can perceive no motion; in fact it is one of the few scenes where a panorama might be taken with a striking approach to truth. From such an eminence, as we look down, I do not know whether it is from the rarefaction of the atmosphere, or being so high above that vapour which overhangs about the lower regions of the earth, or from what other cause, but certainly objects remain distinct at a much greater distance than when on the levels. The effect is that of making the surrounding country appear much nearer than it really is. There is likewise another singularity, no less curious; that is, the stillness and quiet that reign throughout this desert region. We know that even in a perfect calm, on the plains, how the most remote sound is carried along the surface of the earth, to an incredible distance. The slightest murmur of the wind, even in the deserts of Africa, is heard by travellers; and when we cannot distinguish the least motion in the air, we can always discern a confused half stifled noise. Here, however, though in a breeze so keen that it cut us to the bone, I felt a sort of blank or void in my oral organs, which produced a defective, and rather disagreeable sensation. The wind which blew conducted no sound, and from my isolated situation, I was, it seems, almost inaccessible to it. My footsteps I never heard so plainly before, not even in the stillest midnight, although I felt they were not loud. Not the least reverberation was distinguishable, and the scene seemed under some spell, in which it could almost have fancied myself included. An enthusiastic Italian, on

viewing this glorious landscape at sunrise, exclaimed that the island seemed as if it had been created but last night, and was not yet endowed with the powers of life; and I do not know how to convey any better idea of the view, and the impression made on me, than by quoting his words.

The day was not one of those extremely propitious, but very good; and I should be glad to compound for no worse, were I to go the journey again. Not a single cloud was to be seen; at the same time there was a slight distant haziness in the air which prevented us seeing Malta. The range of view was however prodigious. Being nearly 11,000 feet above the level of the sea, I was not able to find out without a little search, promontories and mountains which below I had looked up to and which appeared equally great in their way. Brydone says he is persuaded that there is within the range of the visible horizon of Etna, but in this he must be mistaken. The view from the summit of Etna is one to arrest the attention of any man, whatever his qualifications or endowments, with a most riveting interest. The scholar may here see below him the very spots consecrated by the genius of the noblest ancient poets and historians and scenes which are associated with the dearest of his early recollections. The astronomer will have a new sphere opened to him—for by the great height at which he is arrived he will have left below him those mists and vapours which, nearer the earth, render many thousands of small stars invisible, and others of more difficult vision. The botanist will see a variety of the vegetable tribe, equalled in the same space in no other country. The Lapp-land productions will be nearest him; while as his eye moves along, it will insensibly be led to the region, where plants which thrive in the tropics come to perfection, and all this within thirty miles of him. The antiquary may here find ample room for his speculations, for among the numberless calculations as to Etna, its ruins, the adjacent country, and the anti-