

THE INSTRUCTOR.

No. XLVI.]

MONTREAL, MARCH 26, 1836.

[PRICE 2d.

TRAVELS.

ASCENT OF MOUNT ÆTNA.

From what I have said about the eruption of 1832, you may perhaps feel an interest in hearing an account of a journey which I took up to the very summit of Ætna, only fifteen months prior to this. All was then perfectly still, nor was it until I arrived at the top that any traces of recent fire were visible. It was in the middle of August that I undertook this adventure.

I started from Riposto, where I took measures for my journey. Being the height of summer, it was rather difficult to believe that, even in the regions of Ætna, we could suffer from cold. However, as all travellers agreed that the cold of Ætna was the most piercing they ever endured, I preferred their report to any of my own theories; and it was well for me that I did. A good travelling requeleure cloak, and a suit of winter clothing, which I put on at Nicolosi, were accordingly what I provided myself with. A gentleman of Riposto, at whose house I was kindly entertained and who had several times before visited the mountain, accompanied me—which was a very fortunate circumstance, as I do not know any journey in which the company of one conversant in the roads and mazes of the path is so advantageous, I might say necessary as in this—independent of our guide, whose sole business it is to show us our way.

We chose our time to a nicety. First, I had contrived matters so that I might have the benefit of the moon, which was very nearly full—and although accidents seldom happen from the careful manner in which the mule pick their way, in the thickest obscurity, among the roughest & vilest roads imaginable, yet, from what I saw, I cannot say that I should prefer to go up Ætna in the dark, while it was possible to go in the light. And yet the day time is inconvenient, as one of the great objects is to reach the summit at sunrise.

Some manage to get up to the "English house," as it is called, at sunset, sleep there, and proceed up the cone at twilight the following morning. Against this plan I have heard very strong objections on the score of health. The 'English house' is in a region of perpetual frost; or at least where, if the heat of the sun in July and August thaw the snow during the day, the moment night comes on it again congeals. So sudden a transition from the plains to this has been productive of serious effects. To avoid this, we set out from Riposto about mid-day. We got to Nicolosi about sunset. Here we took some refreshment and rest. The moon rising about ten o'clock at night, we started, and kept on our way, halting a few minutes in the wood to give bait to our animals, and finally arriving at the English house an hour before sunrise. We put the mules into the stable, proceeded on foot, reserving ourselves for breakfast on our return.

Setting off from Riposto, the country over which we have to travel, to judge from its productions, would consist of the richest soil I ever saw; and this is the case where it is not covered by the lava, which has evidently remained many centuries, and upon which vegetation has partially returned. The way that ground destroyed by lava regenerates has been accounted for as follows: there are frequent flaws in it which attract the dust, which in course of time forms a shallow layer of earth producing weeds, which, when rotted, become the means of attracting more soil. The crevices and interstices are thus filled up with soil which is as rich as any other, and sometimes of great service; for the fibres of vines and many other trees, the roots of which shoot deep into the earth, will be found to have entered these cracks, or crannies, and there to have taken such a hold, that they cannot be torn up by heavy rains, or carried away by torrents. The time, however, required for this must be at least several centuries. The whole of the road from Riposto to Nicolosi is