

we may conceive the central elevated plain of Spain resisting the efforts of these great inundations, till the draining of the waters, by the straits formed between the pillars of Hercules, brought the Mediterranean progressively to its present level, lower Egypt emerging above its surface on the one side, and the fertile plains of Tarragona, Valencia, and Murcia, on the other. Everything that relates to the formation of that sea,* which has had so powerful an influence on the first civilization of mankind, is highly interesting. We might suppose, that Spain, forming a promontory amidst the waves, was indebted for its preservation to the height of its land; but in order to give weight to these theoretic ideas, we must clear up the doubts that have arisen respecting the rupture of so many transverse dikes;—we must discuss the probability of the Mediterranean having been formerly divided into several separate basins, of which Sicily and the island of Candia appear to mark the ancient limits. We will not here risk the solution of these problems, but will satisfy ourselves in fixing attention on the striking contrast in the configuration of the land in the eastern and western extremities of Europe. Between the Baltic and the Black Sea, the ground is at present scarcely fifty toises above the level of the ocean, while the plain of La Mancha, if placed between the sources of the Niemen and the Borysthenes, would figure as a group of mountains of considerable height. If the causes, which may have changed the surface of our planet, be an interesting speculation, investigations of the phenomena, such as they offer themselves to the measures and observations of the naturalist, lead to far greater certainty.

From Astorga to Corunna, especially from Lugo, the

* Some of the ancient geographers believed that the Mediterranean, swelled by the waters of the Euxine, the Palus Mæotis, the Caspian Sea, and the Sea of Aral, had broken the pillars of Hercules; others admitted that the irruption was made by the waters of the ocean. In the first of these hypotheses, the height of the land between the Black Sea and the Baltic, and between the ports of Cette and Bordeaux, determine the limit which the accumulation of the waters may have reached before the junction of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic, as well to the north of the Dardanelles, as to the east of this strip of land which formerly joined Europe to Mauritania, and of which, in the time of Strabo, certain vestiges remained in the Islands of Juno and the Moon.