

out metallic grains, the people imagine, on account of the brilliancy of the pyrites, that the torrent bears down gold. It is reported, that, after the great earthquake which took place in 1766, the waters of the Juagua were so charged with gold, that "men who came from a great distance, and whose country was unknown," established washing-places on the spot. They disappeared during the night, after having collected a great quantity of gold. It would be needless to show that this is a fable. Pyrites dispersed in quartzose veins, crossing the mica-slate, are often auriferous, no doubt; but no analogous fact leads to the supposition that the sulphuretted iron which is found in the schistose marls of the alpine limestone, contains gold. Some direct experiments, made with acids, during my abode at Caracas, showed that the pyrites of Cuchivano are not auriferous. Our guides were amazed at my incredulity. In vain I repeated that alum and sulphate of iron only could be obtained from this supposed gold mine; they continued picking up secretly every bit of pyrites they saw sparkling in the water. In countries possessing few mines, the inhabitants entertain exaggerated ideas respecting the facility with which riches are drawn from the bowels of the earth. How much time did we not lose during five years' travels, in visiting, on the pressing invitations of our hosts, ravines, of which the pyritous strata have borne for ages the imposing names of 'Minas de oro!' How often have we been grieved to see men of all classes, magistrates, pastors of villages, grave missionaries, grinding, with inexhaustible patience, amphibole, or yellow mica, in the hope of extracting gold from it by means of mercury! This rage for the search of mines strikes us the more in a climate where the ground needs only to be slightly raked to produce abundant harvests.

After visiting the pyritous marls of the Rio Juagua, we continued following the course of the crevice, which stretches along like a narrow canal overshadowed by very lofty trees. We observed strata on the left bank, opposite Cerro del Cuchivano, singularly crooked and twisted. This phenomenon I had often admired at the Ochsenberg,* in passing the

* This mountain of Switzerland is composed of transition limestone. We find these same inflexions in the strata near Bonneville, at Nante