

or natural meadows, which yield excellent pasture for the cows of the convent, are totally devoid of trees or shrubs. It is the domain of the monocotyledonous plants; for amidst the gramina only a few Maguey\* plants rise here and there; their flowery stalks being more than twenty-six feet high. Having reached the table-land of Guardia, we appeared to be transported to the bed of an old lake, levelled by the long-continued abode of the waters. We seemed to trace the sinuosities of the ancient shore in the tongues of land which jut out from the craggy rock, and even in the distribution of the vegetation. The bottom of the basin is a savannah, while its banks are covered with trees of full growth. This is probably the most elevated valley in the provinces of Venezuela and Cumana. One cannot but regret, that a spot favoured by so temperate a climate, and which without doubt would be fit for the culture of corn, is totally uninhabited.

From the table-land of Guardia we continued to descend, till we reached the Indian village of Santa Cruz. We passed at first along a slope extremely slippery and steep, to which the missionaries had given the name of Baxada del Purgatorio, or Descent of Purgatory. It is a rock of schistose sandstone, decomposed, covered with clay, the talus of which appears frightfully steep, from the effect of a very common optical illusion. When we look down from the top to the bottom of the hill the road seems inclined more than 60°. The mules in going down draw their hind legs near to their fore legs, and lowering their cruppers, let themselves slide at a venture. The rider runs no risk, provided he slacken the bridle, thereby leaving the animal quite free in his movements. From this point we perceived towards the left the great pyramid of Guacharo. The appearance of this calcareous peak is very picturesque, but we soon lost sight of it, on entering the thick forest, known by the name of the Montaña de Santa Maria. We descended without intermission for seven hours. It is difficult to conceive a more tremendous descent; it is absolutely a road of steps, a kind of ravine, in which, during the rainy season, impetuous torrents dash from rock to rock. The steps are from two to three feet high, and the beasts of burden, after measuring with their eyes the space necessary to let their load pass between

\* Agave Americana.