

four hundred and fifty toises high, but very near the sea, does not secure the inhabitants against a scourge which was believed to belong only to the low regions of the coast.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

Abode at Caracas.—Mountains in the vicinity of the Town.—Excursion to the Summit of the Silla.—Indications of Mines.

I REMAINED two months at Caracas, where M. Bonpland and I lived in a large house in the most elevated part of the town. From a gallery we could survey at once the summit of the Silla, the serrated ridge of the Galipano, and the charming valley of the Guayra, the rich culture of which was pleasingly contrasted with the gloomy curtain of the surrounding mountains. It was in the dry season, and to improve the pasturage, the savannahs and the turf covering the steepest rocks were set on fire. These vast conflagrations, viewed from a distance, produce the most singular effects of light. Wherever the savannahs, following the undulating slope of the rocks, have filled up the furrows hollowed out by the waters, the flame appears in a dark night like currents of lava suspended over the valley. The vivid but steady light assumes a reddish tint, when the wind, descending from the Silla, accumulates streams of vapour in the low regions. At other times (and this effect is still more curious) these luminous bands, enveloped in thick clouds, appear only at intervals where it is clear; and as the clouds ascend, their edges reflect a splendid light. These various phenomena, so common in the tropics, acquire additional interest from the form of the mountains, the direction of the slopes, and the height of the savannahs covered with alpine grasses. During the day, the wind of Petare, blowing from the east, drives the smoke towards the town, and diminishes the transparency of the air.

If we had reason to be satisfied with the situation of our house, we had still greater cause for satisfaction in the reception we met with from all classes of the inhabitants. Though I have had the advantage, which few Spaniards have