

this extraordinary configuration of the land, the little rivers of the valleys of Aragua form a peculiar system, and direct their course towards a basin closed on all sides. These rivers do not bear their waters to the ocean; they are collected in a lake; and subject to the peculiar influence of evaporation, they lose themselves, if we may use the expression, in the atmosphere. On the existence of rivers and lakes, the fertility of the soil and the produce of cultivation in these valleys depend. The aspect of the spot, and the experience of half a century, have proved that the level of the waters is not invariable; the waste by evaporation, and the increase from the waters running into the lake, do not uninterruptedly balance each other. The lake being elevated one thousand feet above the neighbouring steppes of Calabozo, and one thousand three hundred and thirty-two feet above the level of the ocean, it has been suspected that there are subterranean communications and filtrations. The appearance of new islands, and the gradual retreat of the waters, have led to the belief that the lake may perhaps, in time, become entirely dry. An assemblage of physical circumstances so remarkable was well fitted to fix my attention on those valleys where the wild beauty of nature is embellished by agricultural industry, and the arts of rising civilization.

The lake of Valencia, called Tacarigua by the Indians, exceeds in magnitude the lake of Neufchatel in Switzerland; but its general form has more resemblance to the lake of Geneva, which is nearly at the same height above the level of the sea. As the slope of the ground in the valleys of Aragua tends towards the south and the west, that part of the basin still covered with water is the nearest to the southern chain of the mountains of Guigue, of Yusma, and of Guacimo, which stretch towards the high savannahs of Ocumare. The opposite banks of the lake of Valencia display a singular contrast; those on the south are desert, and almost uninhabited, and a screen of high mountains

and it is more natural to consider as the limits of the basin of Aragua a line drawn through the sources of the streams flowing into the lake of Valencia. The charts and sections I have traced of the road from Caracas to Nueva Valencia, and from Porto Cabello to Villa de Cura, exhibit the whole of these geological relations.