

Cocuyza to those of Torito and Nirgua, and from La Sierra de Mariara to the chain of Guigue, of Guacimo, and La Palma, was filled with water. Everywhere the form of the promontories, and their steep declivities, seem to indicate the shore of an alpine lake, similar to those of Styria and Tyrol. The same little helicites, the same valvatæ, which now live in the lake of Valencia, are found in layers of three or four feet thick as far inland as Turmero and La Concesion near La Victoria. These facts undoubtedly prove a retreat of the waters; but nothing indicates that this retreat has continued from a very remote period to our days. The valleys of Aragua are among the portions of Venezuela most anciently peopled; and yet there is no mention in Oviedo, or any other old chronicler, of a sensible diminution of the lake. Must we suppose, that this phenomenon escaped their observation, at a time when the Indians far exceeded the white population, and when the banks of the lake were less inhabited? Within half a century, and particularly within these thirty years, the natural desiccation of this great basin has excited general attention. We find vast tracts of land which were formerly inundated, now dry, and already cultivated with plantains, sugar-canes, or cotton. Wherever a hut is erected on the bank of the lake, we see the shore receding from year to year. We discover islands, which, in consequence of the retreat of the waters, are just beginning to be joined to the continent, as for instance the rocky island of Culebra, in the direction of Guigue; other islands already form promontories, as the Morro, between Guigue and Nueva Valencia, and La Cabrera, south-east of Mariara; others again are now rising in the islands themselves like scattered hills. Among these last, so easily recognized at a distance, some are only a quarter of a mile, others a league from the present shore. I may cite as the most remarkable three granite islands, thirty or forty toises high, on the road from the Hacienda de Cura to Aguas Calientes; and at the western extremity of the lake, the Serrito de Don Pedro, Islote, and Caratapona. On visiting two islands* entirely surrounded by water, we found in the

* Isla de Cura and Cabo Blanco. The promontory of Cabrera has been connected with the shore ever since the year 1750 or 1760 by a little valley, which bears the name of Portachuelo.