

high. It is probably a new species of the genus *corypha*; and is called in the country *palma de sombrero*, the footstalks of the leaves being employed in weaving hats resembling our straw hats. This grove of palm-trees, the withered foliage of which rustles at the least breath of air—the camels feeding in the plain—the undulating motion of the vapours on a soil scorched by the ardour of the sun, give the landscape an African aspect. The aridity of the land augments as the traveller approaches the town, after passing the western extremity of the lake. It is a clayey soil, which has been levelled and abandoned by the waters. The neighbouring hills, called Los Morros de Valencia, are composed of white tufa, a very recent limestone formation, immediately covering the gneiss. It is again found at Victoria, and on several other points along the chain of the coast. The whiteness of this tufa, which reflects the rays of the sun, contributes greatly to the excessive heat felt in this place. Everything seems smitten with sterility; scarcely are a few plants of cacao found on the banks of the Rio de Valencia; the rest of the plain is bare, and destitute of vegetation. This appearance of sterility is here attributed, as it is everywhere in the valleys of Aragua, to the cultivation of indigo; which, according to the planters, is, of all plants, that which most exhausts (*cansa*) the ground. The real physical causes of this phenomenon would be an interesting inquiry, since, like the effects of fallowing land, and of a rotation of crops, it is far from being sufficiently understood. I shall only observe in general, that the complaints of the increasing sterility of cultivated land become more frequent between the tropics, in proportion as they are near the period of their first breaking-up. In a region almost destitute of herbs, where every plant has a ligneous stem, and tends to raise itself as a shrub, the virgin soil remains shaded either by great trees, or by bushes; and under this tufted shade it preserves everywhere coolness and humidity. However active the vegetation of the tropics may appear, the number of roots that penetrate into the earth, is not so great in an uncultivated soil; while the plants are nearer to each other in lands subjected to cultivation, and covered with indigo, sugar-canes, or cassava. The trees and shrubs, loaded with