

particularly from the valley of the Rio Mucuju,* to the east of Merida. The inhabitants altogether neglect this production, so much sought for in commerce.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mountains which separate the Valleys of Aragua from the Llanos of Caracas.—Villa de Cura.—Parapara.—Llanos or Steppes.—Calabozo.

THE chain of mountains, bordering the lake of Tacarigua towards the south, forms in some sort the northern shore of the great basin of the Llanos or savannahs of Caracas. To descend from the valleys of Aragua into these savannahs, it is necessary to cross the mountains of Guigue and of Tucutunemo. From a peopled country embellished by cultivation, we plunge into a vast solitude. Accustomed to the aspect of rocks, and to the shade of valleys, the traveller beholds with astonishment these savannahs without trees, these immense plains, which seem to ascend to the horizon.

Before I trace the scenery of the Llanos, or of the region of pasturage, I will briefly describe the road we took from Nueva Valencia, by Villa de Cura and San Juan, to the little village of Ortiz, at the entrance of the steppes. We left the valleys of Aragua on the 6th of March before sunrise. We passed over a plain richly cultivated, keeping along the south-west side of the lake of Valencia, and crossing the ground left uncovered by the waters of the lake. We were never weary of admiring the fertility of the soil, covered with calabashes, water-melons, and plantains. The rising of the sun was announced by the distant noise of the howling monkeys. Approaching a group of trees, which rise in the midst of the plain, between those parts which were anciently the islets of Don Pedro and La Negra, we saw numerous bands of araguatos moving as in procession and very slowly, from one tree to another. A male was followed by a great number of females; several of the latter carrying

* This little river descends from the Paramo de los Conejos, and flows into the Rio Albarregas.