

but the *desiertos* of Sechura and Atacamez. This solitary tract is not broad, but it is four hundred and forty leagues long. The rock pierces everywhere though the quicksands. No drop of rain ever falls on it; and, like the desert of Sahara, north of Timbuctoo, the Peruvian desert affords, near Huaura, a rich mine of native salt. Everywhere else, in the New World, there are plains desert because not inhabited, but no real deserts.*

The same phenomena are repeated in the most distant regions; and, instead of designating those vast treeless plains in accordance with the nature of the plants they produce, it seems natural to class them into deserts, steppes, or savannahs; into bare lands without any appearance of vegetation, and lands covered with gramina or small plants of the dicotyledonous tribe. The savannahs of America, especially those of the temperate zone, have in many works been designated by the French term prairies; but this appears to me little applicable to pastures which are often very dry, though covered with grass of four or five feet in height. The Llanos and the Pampas of South America are really steppes. They are covered with beautiful verdure in the rainy season, but in the time of great drought they assume the aspect of a desert. The grass is then reduced to powder; the earth cracks; the alligators and the great serpents remain buried in the dried mud, till awakened from their long lethargy by the first showers of spring. These phenomena are observed on barren tracts of fifty or sixty leagues in length, wherever the savannahs are not traversed by rivers; for on the borders of rivulets, and around little pools of stagnant water, the traveller finds at certain distances, even during the period of the great droughts, thickets of mauritia, a palm, the leaves of which spread out like a fan, and preserve a brilliant verdure.

The steppes of Asia are all beyond the tropics, and form very elevated table-lands. America also has savannahs of

* We are almost tempted, however, to give the name of desert to that vast and sandy table-land of Brazil, the Campos dos Parecis, which gives birth to the rivers Tapajos, Paraguay, and Madeira, and which reaches the summit of the highest mountains. Almost destitute of vegetation, it reminds us of Gobi, in Mongolia.