

considerable extent on the backs of the mountains of Mexico, Peru, and Quito; but its most extensive steppes, the Llanos of Cumana, Caracas, and Meta, are little raised above the level of the ocean, and all belong to the equinoctial zone. These circumstances give them a peculiar character. They have not, like the steppes of southern Asia; and the deserts of Persia, those lakes without issue, those small systems of rivers which lose themselves either in the sands, or by subterranean filtrations. The Llanos of America incline to the east and south; and their running waters are branches of the Orinoco.

The course of these rivers once led me to believe, that the plains formed table-lands, raised at least from one hundred to one hundred and fifty toises above the level of the ocean. I supposed that the deserts of interior Africa were also at a considerable height; and that they rose one above another as in tiers, from the coast to the interior of the continent. No barometer has yet been carried into the Sahara. With respect to the Llanos of America, I found by barometric heights observed at Calabozo, at the Villa del Pao, and at the mouth of the Meta, that their height is only forty or fifty toises above the level of the sea. The fall of the rivers is extremely gentle, often nearly imperceptible; and therefore the least wind, or the swelling of the Orinoco, causes a reflux in those rivers that flow into it. The Indians believe themselves to be descending during a whole day, when navigating from the mouths of these rivers to their sources. The descending waters are separated from those that flow back by a great body of stagnant water, in which, the equilibrium being disturbed, whirlpools are formed very dangerous for boats.

The chief characteristic of the savannahs or steppes of South America is the absolute want of hills and inequalities, —the perfect level of every part of the soil. Accordingly the Spanish conquerors, who first penetrated from Coro to the banks of the Apure, did not call them deserts or savannahs, or meadows, but plains (llanos). Often within a distance of thirty square leagues there is not an eminence of a foot high. This resemblance to the surface of the sea strikes the imagination most powerfully where the plains are