

America would then, like the centre of Asia, have had its conquerors, who, ascending from the plains to the tablelands of the Cordilleras, and abandoning a wandering life, would have subdued the civilized nations of Peru and New Grenada, overturned the throne of the Incas and of the Zaque,* and substituted for the despotism which is the fruit of theocracy, that despotism which arises from the patriarchal government of a pastoral people. In the New World the human race has not experienced these great moral and political changes, because the steppes, though more fertile than those of Asia, have remained without herds; because none of the animals that furnish milk in abundance are natives of the plains of South America; and because, in the progressive unfolding of American civilization, the intermediate link is wanting that connects the hunting with the agricultural nations.

We have thought proper to bring together these general notions on the plains of the New Continent, and the contrast they exhibit to the deserts of Africa and the fertile steppes of Asia, in order to give some interest to the narrative of a journey across lands of so monotonous an aspect. Having now accomplished this task, I shall trace the route by which we proceeded from the volcanic mountains of Parapara and the northern side of the Llanos, to the banks of the Apure, in the province of Varinas.

After having passed two nights on horseback, and sought in vain, by day, for some shelter from the heat of the sun beneath the tufts of the moriche palm-trees, we arrived before night at the little Hato del Cayman,† called also La Guadalupe. It was a solitary house in the steppes, surrounded by a few small huts, covered with reeds and skins. The cattle, oxen, horses, and mules are not penned, but wander freely over an extent of several square leagues. There is nowhere any enclosure; men, naked to the waist and armed with a lance, ride over the savannahs to inspect the animals; bringing back those that wander too far from the pastures of the farm, and branding all that do not already bear the mark of their proprietor. These mulattos, who are known

* The Zaque was the secular chief of Cundinamarca. His power was shared with the high priest (lama) of Iraca.

† The Farm of the Alligator.