

valley separating the Eastern Cordillera, distinguished by the majestic mass of Cotopaxi from the western, remarkable for the extinct volcanoes of Illinissa and Chimborazo. By a gentle ascent the travellers reached the Indian village of Calpi, situated at the foot of the mountain, and chosen as their quarters for the night.

The plain of Tapia is itself not less than 9500 feet above the sea-level; it is covered with groves of cactus and echinus, but agriculture cannot be successfully prosecuted on account of the severe nocturnal frosts. It is with difficulty, indeed, that the lama can find a meagre nourishment in these barren regions.

Early in the morning of the 23rd, Humboldt and Bonpland quitted the village of Calpi to attack Chimborazo on the south-east side. The summit of its peak is surrounded by plains, which rise above one another in a series of terraces. These plains, or, to use the American term, *llanos*, blooming with vegetation, surpass in altitude the peak of Teneriffe. Perfectly horizontal, these llanos may be compared

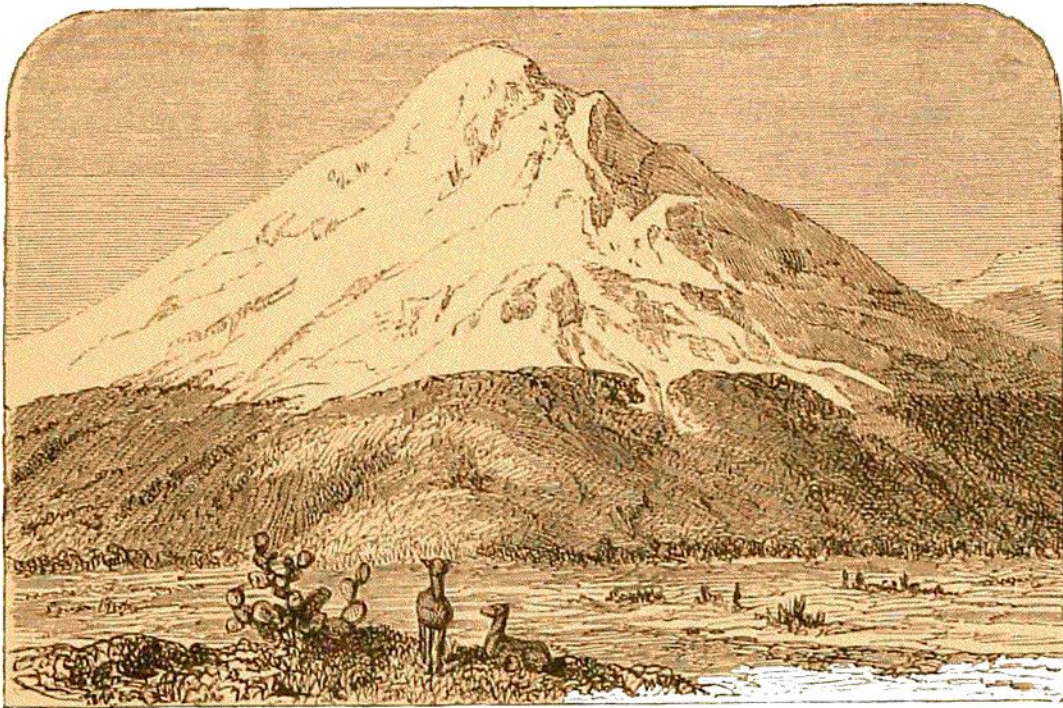


FIG. 63.—CHIMBORAZO.

to the bed of a dried-up lake, and remind the traveller of the steppes of Central Asia. Their vegetation is composed of grasses, purple gentian, and other sub-Alpine species. At this elevation the mean annual temperature is still as high as 9° C. — that is, nearly equal to that of London; but the nights are colder than in England.

Above the plateau of Sisgun, 12,400 feet, lies the lake of Yana-Concha, a mountain-pool, not more than 150 feet in length. The snowy crest of Chimborazo here reveals itself to the traveller in occasional flashes of white light through the clouds and dense mist that closely embrace it. At this elevation, 14,700 feet, Humboldt dismounted from his mule, the snow having fallen heavily on the preceding day. Bonpland and Montufar also left behind their horses, to remount them on their return.