

soil between Valencia and Guigue, the little hills rising abruptly in the plain east of the Caño de Cambury, some of which (el Islote and la Isla de la Negra or Caratapona) have even preserved the name of islands, sufficiently prove that the waters have retired considerably since the time of Oviedo. With respect to the change in the general form of the lake, it appears to me improbable that in the seventeenth century its breadth was nearly the half of its length. The situation of the granite mountains of Mariara and of Guigue, the slope of the ground which rises more rapidly towards the north and south than towards the east and west, are alike repugnant to this supposition.

In treating the long-discussed question of the diminution of the waters, I conceive we must distinguish between the different periods at which the sinking of their level has taken place. Wherever we examine the valleys of rivers, or the basins of lakes, we see the ancient shore at great distances. No doubt seems now to be entertained, that our rivers and lakes have undergone immense diminutions; but many geological facts remind us also, that these great changes in the distribution of the waters have preceded all historical times; and that for many thousand years most lakes have attained a permanent equilibrium between the produce of the water flowing in, and that of evaporation and filtration. Whenever we find this equilibrium broken, it will be well rather to examine whether the rupture be not owing to causes merely local, and of very recent date, than to admit an uninterrupted diminution of the water. This reasoning is conformable to the more circumspect method of modern science. At a time when the physical history of the world, traced by the genius of some eloquent writers, borrowed all its charms from the fictions of imagination, the phenomenon of which we are treating would have been adduced as a new proof of the contrast these writers sought to establish between the two continents. To demonstrate that America rose later than Asia and Europe from the bosom of the waters, the lake of Tacarigua would have been described as one of those interior basins which have not yet become dry by the effects of slow and gradual evaporation. I have no doubt that, in very remote times, the whole valley, from the foot of the mountains of