

and July, communicate with the basin of the Amazon and the Rio Negro, bounded on one side by the Cordillera of Chiquitos, and on the other by the mountains of Parime. The opening which is left between the latter and the Andes of New Grenada, occasions this communication. The aspect of the country here reminds us, but on a much larger scale, of the plains of Lombardy, which also are only fifty or sixty toises above the level of the ocean; and are directed first from La Brenta to Turin, east and west; and then from Turin to Coni, north and south. If we were authorized, from other geological facts, to regard the three great plains of the Lower Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Rio de la Plata as basins of ancient lakes,\* we should imagine we perceived in the plains of the Rio Vichada and the Meta, a channel by which the waters of the upper lake (those of the plains of the Amazon) forced their way towards the lower basin, (that of the Llanos of Caracas,) separating the Cordillera of La Parime from that of the Andes. This channel is a kind of land-strait. The ground, which is perfectly level between the Guaviare, the Meta, and the Apure, displays no vestige of a violent irruption of the waters; but on the edge of the Cordillera of Parime, between the latitudes of  $4^{\circ}$  and  $7^{\circ}$ , the Orinoco, flowing in a westerly direction from its source to the mouth of the Guaviare, has forced its way through the rocks, directing its course from south to north. All the great cataracts, as we shall soon see, are within the latitudes just named. When the river has reached the mouth of the Apure in that very low ground where the slope towards the north is met by the counter-slope towards the south-east, that is to say, by the inclination of the plains which rise imperceptibly towards the mountains of Caracas, the river turns anew and flows eastward. It appeared to me, that it was proper to fix the attention of the reader on these singular inflexions of the Orinoco because, belonging at once to two basins, its course marks, in some sort, even on the most imperfect maps, the direction of that part of the plains intervening

\* In Siberia, the great steppes between the Irtysh and the Obi, especially that of Baraba, full of salt lakes (Tchabakly, Tchany, Karasouk, and Topolony), appear to have been, according to the Chinese tradition, even within historical times, an inland sea.