

this subject too much in detail, were it not connected with general physiological views. Our imagination is struck only by what is great; but the lover of natural philosophy should reflect equally on little things. We have just seen that winged insects, collected in society, and concealing in their sucker a liquid that irritates the skin, are capable of rendering vast countries almost uninhabitable. Other insects equally small, the termites (comejen),* create obstacles to the progress of civilization, in several hot and temperate parts of the equinoctial zone, that are difficult to be surmounted. They devour paper, pasteboard, and parchment with frightful rapidity, utterly destroying records and libraries. Whole provinces of Spanish America do not possess one written document that dates a hundred years back. What improvement can the civilization of nations acquire if nothing link the present with the past; if the depositaries of human knowledge must be repeatedly renewed; if the records of genius and reason cannot be transmitted to posterity?

In proportion as you ascend the table-land of the Andes these evils disappear. Man breathes a fresh and pure air. Insects no more disturb the labours of the day or the slumbers of the night. Documents can be collected in archives without our having to complain of the voracity of the termites. Mosquitos are no longer feared at a height of two hundred toises; and the termites, still very frequent at three hundred toises of elevation,* become very rare at Mexico, Santa Fé de Bogotá, and Quito. In these great capitals, situated on the back of the Cordilleras, we find libraries and archives, augmented from day to day by the enlightened zeal of the inhabitants. These circumstances, combined with others, insure a moral preponderance to the Alpine region over the lower regions of the torrid zone. If we admit, agreeably to the ancient traditions collected in both the old and new worlds, that at the time of the catastrophe which preceded the renewal of our species, man descended from the mountains into the plains, we may admit, with still greater confidence, that these mountains,

* Literally, 'the eaters,' or 'the devourers.'

† There are some at Popayan (height 910 toises; mean temperature 18.7°), but they are species that gnaw wood only.