

SECTION I.

Configuration of the Country—Inequalities of the Soil—Chains and Groups of Mountains—Divisionary Ridges—Plains or Llanos.

SOUTH AMERICA is one of those great triangular masses which form the three continental parts of the southern hemisphere of the globe. In its exterior configuration it resembles Africa more than Australia. The southern extremities of the three continents are so placed, that in sailing from the Cape of Good Hope (lat. $33^{\circ} 55'$) to Cape Horn (lat. $55^{\circ} 58'$), and doubling the southern point of Van Diemen's Land (lat. $43^{\circ} 38'$), we see those lands stretching out towards the south pole in proportion as we advance eastward. A fourth part of the 571,000 square sea leagues* which South America comprises, is covered with mountains distributed in chains, or gathered together in groups. The other parts are plains forming long uninterrupted bands covered with forests or gramina, flatter than in Europe, and rising progressively, at the distance of 300 leagues from the coast, between 30 and 170 toises above the level of the sea. The most considerable mountainous chain in South America extends from south to north, according to the greatest dimension of the continent; it is not central like the European chains, nor far removed from the sea-shore, like the Himalaya and the Hindoo-Koosh; but it is thrown towards the western extremity of the continent, almost on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Referring to the profile which I have given† of the configuration of South America, in the latitude of Chimborazo and Grand Para, across the plains of the Amazon, we find the land low towards the east, in an inclined plane, at an angle of less than 25 seconds on a length of 600 leagues; and if, in the ancient state of our planet, the Atlantic Ocean, by some extraordinary cause, ever rose to 1100 feet above its present level (a height one-third less than the table-lands of Spain and Bavaria), the waves must, in the province of Jaen de Bracamoros, have broken upon the rocks that bound the eastern

* Almost double the extent of Europe.

† Map of Columbia, according to the astronomical observations of Humboldt, by A. H. Brué, 1823.