

dilleras being altogether in disuse as applied to the chains of mountains extending from the eastern gulf of Maracaibo to the promontory of Paria, we shall continue to designate those chains (stretching from west to east) by the names of "littoral chain," or "coast-chain of Venezuela."

Of the three insulated groups of mountains, that is to say, those which are not branches of the Cordillera of the Andes and its continuation towards the shore of Venezuela, one is on the north, and the other two on the west of the Andes: that on the north is the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta; the two others are the Sierra de la Parime, between  $4^{\circ}$  and  $8^{\circ}$  of north latitude, and the mountains of Brazil, between  $15^{\circ}$  and  $28^{\circ}$  south latitude. This singular distribution of great inequalities of soil produces three plains or basins, comprising a surface of 420,600 square leagues, or four-fifths of all South America, east of the Andes. Between the coast-chain of Venezuela and the group of the Parime, the plains of the Apure and the Lower Orinoco extend; between the group of Parime and the Brazil mountains are the plains of the Amazon, of the Rio Negro, and the Madeira, and between the groups of Brazil and the southern extremity of the continent are the plains of Rio de la Plata, and of Patagonia. As the group of the Parime in Spanish Guiana, and of the Brazil mountains (or of Minas Geraes and Goyaz), do not join the Cordillera of the Andes of New Grenada and Upper Peru towards the west, the three plains of the Lower Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Rio de la Plata, are connected by land-straits of considerable breadth. These straits are also plains stretching from north to south, and traversed by ridges imperceptible to the eye, but forming "divortia aquarum." These ridges (and this remarkable phenomenon has hitherto escaped the attention of geologists) are situated between  $2^{\circ}$  and  $3^{\circ}$  north latitude, and  $16^{\circ}$  and  $18^{\circ}$  south latitude. The first ridge forms the partition of the waters which fall into the Lower Orinoco on the north-east, and into the Rio Negro and the Amazon on the south and south-east; the second ridge divides the tributary streams of the right bank of the Amazon and the Rio de la Plata. These ridges, of which the existence is only manifested, as in Volhynia, by the course of the waters, are parallel with the coast-chain of Venezuela; they present, as it were, two