connected them with the group of broken and dispersed lands filling the centre of the great basin, and of which Australia is the most important. They resemble the wrecks of a shattered continent.

The strata composing the soil of the continents gradually subside under the sea, re-appear on the other side, and in the interspace form the bed of the vast basins of the Pacific and the Atlantic.

The shores of the Atlantic by no means exhibit such bold escarpments as the eastern and western cliffs of the Pacific, with their chains of Cordilleras and Andes. The general inclination of the table-lands surrounding the Atlantic is much more gradual, and this sinuous basin, notwithstanding its vastness, seems but a stupendous canal or a colossal Mediterranean!

Having completed this rapid general survey, we may proceed to a more detailed examination of the different mountain-systems of the globe.

The terrestrial summits are far from being so lofty as those of the Moon or of the planet Venus; nevertheless, such peaks as Mount Everest and Guarisankar in Asia, exceeding 28,000 feet, present no contemptible aspect. Only the reader must not suppose that the protuberance of these masses sensibly affects the spherical form of the earth; since, as we have remarked in a preceding chapter, the greatest height of any known mountain does not exceed 29,000 feet, or about $\frac{1}{1500}$ of the diameter of the globe. Now, the diameter of an average-sized orange is from 4 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and this figure ($\frac{1}{1500}$) corresponds, therefore, to a wrinkle on the rind of about the thickness of a sheet of paper. But we must not forget that this calculation is based on the height of the loftiest mountains of the Earth. How shall we represent the ordinary mountain-chains, 5000 to 7000 feet high, in proportion to their exact dimensions, on a sphere of the size of an orange? They would be imperceptible. Despite, then, its valleys and its mountains, the Earth is perfectly rounded; the most skilful turner could not throw off his lathe so complete a sphere.*

* When we speak of the height of a mountain-chain, it is advisable to distinguish the elevation of the peaks and the mean elevation of the passes, or *cols*, which represent the