

Nor is this a modern condition of things. For centuries prior to the Spanish Conquest, these table-lands were the seat of the civilization of a mysterious race which "bear the same relation to the Incas and the present inhabitants that the Etruscans bear to the ancient Romans and to the Italians of our own days."

To one of those lofty table-lands, the so-called valley of Desaguadero, we have already referred. It is bounded on either hand by a colossal chain of the Bolivian Andes: that on the west forming the Coast Cordillera; that on the east the Bolivian Cordillera proper, or Cordillera Real. The whole breadth of both chains and of the intervening table-lands is only 226 miles. The Coast Cordillera consists of a succession of active and extinct volcanoes. In the northern portion of the Cordillera Real occur the three magnificent peaks of Sorata, Huayna-Potosi, and Illimani, whose upper flanks bristle with enormous glaciers, while far below blooms a world of luxuriant vegetation.

At the mountain-group of Vilcañota, the two chains again unite; and beyond, the lofty passes are traversed by the four ancient Peruvian roads, which converged from different parts of the empire of the Incas to its capital and sacred city, Cuzco.

The elevated plain of Bourbon, and the silver mines of Pasco, are situated at an elevation of 14,000 feet, in latitude 11° S. Here, too, is the lake of Lauricocha, one of the remotest reservoirs of the great Amazons river.

The Andes thereafter divide into three parallel ranges; the more eastern separating the tropical valley of the Yucayali from that of the Huallaga, and the central dividing the latter from the less fertile valley of the Upper Marañon. They re-unite in the group or mountain-knot of Loxa, on the frontiers of Ecuador, in about latitude 5° S.

Between the 4th and 3rd parallels the chain once more breaks up into two parallel masses, which shut in the valleys of Cuença, Tapia, and Quito—the latter remarkable for its majestic scenery—and, after a course of nearly 400 miles, converge in the mountain-group of Los Pastos, on the borders of New Granada.