

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOW LEVELS OF EARTH :—THE STEPPES, THE PLAINS, AND THE DESERTS.



WHEN the valley which intervenes between two opposite ranges of mountains is of great breadth, we call it a *Plain*.

Such valleys, forming plains of vast extent, are numerous enough in the Old Continent. In Europe, it is only necessary to recall to the reader's recollection those which occur in the north of France, in the Netherlands, in Northern Germany, and on the shores of the Baltic, and especially in the south of Russia. Their general characteristic is that of a vast inclined plane of undulating surface, sloping very gradually towards the north and south-east. In the west of Europe, the traveller often meets with wide tracts of uncultivated soil, clothed with heath, and stretching far beyond the range of human vision ; such are the Landes, or Hernes, of which such remarkable examples are found in Westphalia, in the south of France, and, with some distinctive features, in the Highlands of Scotland.

[The Landes of Gascony are a strange, wild, and desolate-looking region ; a waste of pine trees and fir trees, of white sand, and furze, and heather ; intersected with stagnant ditches, and dotted with sombre pools. Its inhabitants are shepherds, who, mounted on stilts, stalk abroad over the shifting soil and the prickly bushes, driving their sheep or notching their trees in the wilderness. Their huts are of the most primitive construction, and their lives a constant reproach to those visionary theorists who would fain connect the happiness of man with the supposed joys of solitude. The landscape is not one, however, to stimulate thought or feed emotion ; it possesses no romantic or sublime features ; it seems a blending of earth and sky in one vast ocean of dreary misty verdure, on whose confines rests an eternal barrier of cloud.]