

corn, as we usually call it, has continued to follow him up from the lowest level; but he now first sees fields of wheat, and the other European grains, brought into the country by the conquerors. Mingled with them he views the plantations of the aloe or maguey (*agave Americana*), applied to such various and important uses by the Aztecs. The oaks now acquire a sturdier growth, and the dark forests of pine announce that he has entered the *tierra fria*, or cold region, the third and last of the great natural terraces into which the country is divided. When he has climbed to the height of between seven and eight thousand feet, the weary traveller sets his foot on the summit of the Cordillera of the Andes,—the colossal range that, after traversing South America and the Isthmus of Darien, spreads out, as it enters Mexico, into that vast sheet of table land which maintains an elevation of more than six thousand feet, for the distance of nearly two hundred leagues, until it gradually declines in the higher latitudes of the north.*

Across this mountain rampart a chain of volcanic hills stretches, in a westerly direction, of still more stupendous dimensions, forming, indeed, some of the highest land on the globe. Their peaks, entering the limits of perpetual snow, diffuse a grateful coolness over the elevated plateaus below; for these last, though termed "cold," enjoy a climate, the mean temperature of which is not lower than that of the central parts of Italy.† The air is exceedingly dry; the soil, though naturally good, is rarely clothed with the luxuriant vegetation of the lower regions. It frequently, indeed, has a parched and barren aspect, owing partly to the greater evaporation which takes place on these lofty plains, through the diminished pressure of the atmosphere; and partly, no doubt, to the want of trees to shelter the soil from the fierce influence of the summer sun. In the time of the Aztecs, the table land was thickly covered with larch, oak, cypress, and other forest trees, the extraordinary dimensions of some of which, remaining to the present day, show that the curse of barrenness in later times is chargeable more on man than on nature. Indeed the early Spaniards made as indiscriminate war on the forests as did our Puritan ancestors, though with much less reason. After once conquering the country, they had no lurking ambush to fear from the submissive, semi-civilised Indian, and were not, like our forefathers, obliged to keep watch and ward for a century. This spoliation of the ground, however, is said to have been pleasing to their imaginations, as it reminded them of the plains of their own Castile,—the table land of Europe;‡ where the nakedness of the landscape forms the burden of every traveller's lament, who visits that country.

Midway across the continent, somewhat nearer the Pacific than the Atlantic Ocean, at an elevation of nearly seven thousand five hundred feet, is the celebrated Valley of Mexico. It is of an oval form, about

* This long extent of country varies in elevation from 5570 to 8856 feet,—equal to the height of the passes of Mount Cenis, or the Great St. Bernard. The table land stretches still three hundred leagues further, before it declines to a level of 2624 feet.

† About 62° Fahrenheit, or 17° Réaumur. The more elevated plateaus of the table land, as the Valley of Toluca, about 8500 feet above the sea, have a stern climate, in which the thermometer, during a great part of the day, rarely rises beyond 45° F.

‡ The elevation of the Castiles, according to the authority repeatedly cited, is about 350 toises, or 2100 feet above the ocean (Humboldt). It is rare to find plains in Europe of so great a height.