DESCRIPTIVE OUTLINE

OF THE

PAMPAS,

&c. &c.

The mountains of the Andes run about North and South through the whole of South America, and they are consequently nearly parallel to the two shores of the Pacific and the Atlantic Oceans, dividing the country between them into two unequal parts, each bounded by an Ocean and by the Cordillera.

It would at first be expected that these twin countries, separated only by a range of mountains, should have a great resemblance to each other; but variety is the attribute of Omnipotence, and nature has granted to these two countries a difference of climate and geological construction which is very remarkable.

From the tops of the Andes she supplies both
of them with water; by the gradual melting of the snow they are both irrigated exactly in proportion to their wants; and vegetation, instead of being exhausted by the burning sun of summer, is thus nourished and supported by the very heat which threatened to destroy it.

The water, however, which flows through Chili towards the Pacific, is confined in its whole course, and forces its way through a country as mountainous as the highlands of Scotland or Switzerland. The water which descends from the east side of the Cordillera meanders through a vast plain nine hundred miles in breadth; and at the top of the Andes, it is singular to observe on the right and left the snow of one storm, part of which is decreed to rush into the Pacific, while the other is to add to the distant waves of the Atlantic.

The great plain, or Pampas, on the east of the Cordillera, is about nine hundred miles in breadth, and the part which I have visited, though under the same latitude, is divided into regions of different climate and produce. On leaving Buenos Aires, the first of these regions is covered for one hundred and eighty miles with clover and thistles;
the second region, which extends for four hundred and fifty miles, produces long grass; and the third region, which reaches the base of the Cordillera, is a grove of low trees and shrubs. The second and third of these regions have nearly the same appearance throughout the year, for the trees and shrubs are evergreens, and the immense plain of grass only changes its colour from green to brown; but the first region varies with the four seasons of the year in a most extraordinary manner. In winter, the leaves of the thistles are large and luxuriant, and the whole surface of the country has the rough appearance of a turnip-field. The clover in this season is extremely rich and strong; and the sight of the wild cattle grazing in full liberty on such pasture is very beautiful. In spring, the clover has vanished, the leaves of the thistles have extended along the ground, and the country still looks like a rough crop of turnips. In less than a month the change is most extraordinary; the whole region becomes a luxuriant wood of enormous thistles, which have suddenly shot up to a height of ten or eleven feet, and are all in full bloom. The road or path is hemmed in on both
sides; the view is completely obstructed; not an animal is to be seen; and the stems of the thistles are so close to each other, and so strong, that, independent of the prickles with which they are armed, they form an impenetrable barrier. The sudden growth of these plants is quite astonishing; and though it would be an unusual misfortune in military history, yet it is really possible, that an invading army, unacquainted with this country, might be imprisoned by these thistles before they had time to escape from them. The summer is not over before the scene undergoes another rapid change: the thistles suddenly lose their sap and verdure, their heads droop, the leaves shrink and fade, the stems become black and dead, and they remain rattling with the breeze one against another, until the violence of the pampero or hurricane levels them with the ground, where they rapidly decompose and disappear—the clover rushes up, and the scene is again verdant.

Although a few individuals are either scattered along the path, which traverses these vast plains, or are living together in small groups, yet the general state of the country is the same as it has
been since the first year of its creation. The whole country bears the noble stamp of an Omnipotent Creator, and it is impossible for any one to ride through it, without feelings which it is very pleasing to entertain; for although in all countries "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work," yet the surface of populous countries affords generally the insipid produce of man's labour; it is an easy error to consider that he who has tilled the ground, and has sown the seed, is the author of his crop, and, therefore, those who are accustomed to see the confused produce, which in populous and cultivated countries is the effect of leaving ground to itself, are at first surprised in the Pampas, to observe the regularity and beauty of the vegetable world when left to the wise arrangements of Nature.

The vast region of grass in the Pampas for four hundred and fifty miles is without a weed, and the region of wood is equally extraordinary. The trees are not crowded, but in their growth such beautiful order is observed, that one may gallop between them in every direction. The young trees are rising up, others are flourishing in full vigour, and it is for
some time that one looks in vain for those which in the great system of succession must necessarily somewhere or other be sinking towards decay. They are at last discovered, but their fate is not allowed to disfigure the general cheerfulness of the scene, and they are seen enjoying what may literally be termed a green old age. The extremities of their branches break off as they die, and when nothing is left but the hollow trunk, it is still covered with twigs and leaves, and at last is gradually concealed from view by the young shoot, which, born under the shelter of its branches, now rises rapidly above it, and conceals its decay. A few places are met with which have been burnt by accident, and the black desolate spot, covered with the charred trunks of trees, resembles a scene in the human world of pestilence or war. But the fire is scarcely extinct, when the surrounding trees all seem to spread their branches towards each other, and young shrubs are seen rising out of the ground, while the sapless trunks are evidently mouldering into dust.

The rivers all preserve their course, and the whole country is in such beautiful order, that if
cities and millions of inhabitants could suddenly be planted at proper intervals and situations, the people would have nothing to do but to drive out their cattle to graze, and, without any previous preparation, to plough whatever quantity of ground their wants might require.

The climate of the Pampas is subject to a great difference of temperature in winter and summer, though the gradual changes are very regular. The winter is about as cold as our month of November, and the ground at sunrise is always covered with white frost, but the ice is seldom more than one-tenth of an inch thick. In summer the sun is very oppressively hot*, and its force is acknowledged by every living animal. The wild horses and cattle are evidently exhausted by it, and the siesta seems to be a repose which is natural and necessary to all. The middle of the day is not a moment for work, and as the mornings are cool, the latter are evidently best adapted for labour, and the former for repose.

* I have twice ridden across the Morea, which lies nearly in the same latitude (north) as the path across the Pampas, and I think the climate of the latter is hotter than the Morea, Sicily, Malta, or Gibraltar, in summer, and colder in winter.
The difference between the atmosphere of Mendoza, St. Lewis, and Buenos Aires, which are all nearly under the same latitude, is very extraordinary: in the two former, or in the regions of wood and grass, the air is extremely dry; there is no dew at night; in the hottest weather there is apparently very little perspiration, and the dead animals lie on the plain dried up in their skins, so that occasionally I have at first scarcely been able to determine whether they were alive or dead. But in the province of Buenos Aires, or in the region of thistles and clover, vegetation clearly announces the humidity of the climate. In sleeping out at night I have found my poncho (or rug) nearly wet through with the dew, and my boots so damp that I could scarcely draw them on. The dead animals on the plain are in a rapid state of putrefaction. On arriving at Buenos Aires, the walls of the houses are so damp that it is cheerless to enter them; and sugar, as also all deliquescent salts, are there found nearly dissolved. This dampness, however, does not appear to be unhealthy. The Gauchos and even travellers sleep on the ground, and the inhabitants of Buenos Aires live in their damp houses without
complaining of rheumatism, or being at all subject to cold; and they certainly have the appearance of being rather more robust and healthy than those who live in the drier regions. However, the whole of the Pampas may be said to enjoy as beautiful and as salubrious an atmosphere as the most healthy parts of Greece and Italy, and without being subject to malaria.

The only irregularity in the climate is the pampero or south-west wind, which, generated by the cold air of the Andes, rushes over these vast plains with a velocity and a violence which it is almost impossible to withstand. But this rapid circulation of the atmosphere has very beneficial effects, and the weather, after one of these tempests, is always particularly healthy and agreeable.

The south part of the Pampas is inhabited by the Pampas Indians, who have no fixed abode, but wander from place to place as the herbage around them becomes consumed by their cattle. The north part of the Pampas, and the rest of the Provinces of the Río de la Plata, are inhabited by a few straggling individuals, and a few small groups of people, who live together only because they were
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born together. Their history is really very curious.

As soon as by the fall of the Spaniards their indep-
endence was established, and they became free,
the attention of many individuals of the Provinces
of La Plata was directed towards the due constitu-
tion of governments which might maintain the free-
dom that was gained, encourage population, and
gradually embellish the surface of a most interesting
and beautiful country with the arts, manufactures,
and sciences, which had hitherto been denied it; but
the singular situation of the country presented
very serious difficulties.

Although immense regions of rich land lay un-
cultivated and unowned, yet something had been
done. Small towns and establishments (originally
chosen for mining purposes,) five hundred and
seven hundred miles distant from one another, were
thinly scattered over this vast extent of country;
and thus a skeleton map of civilization had been
traced, which the narrow interests of every indi-
vidual naturally supported.

But although a foundation was thus laid, the
building plan of the Spaniards was missing. It