

contracted, retaining only forty feet in height, and that it continued stretching to north-east, without deviating from its primitive direction, which is parallel to that of the great valley of Caripe.

In this part of the cavern, the rivulet deposits a blackish mould, very like the matter which, in the grotto of Muggendorf, in Franconia, is called "the earth of sacrifice."* We could not discover whether this fine and spongy mould falls through the cracks which communicate with the surface of the ground above, or is washed down by the rain-water penetrating into the cavern. It was a mixture of siliceous, alumina, and vegetable detritus. We walked in thick mud to a spot where we beheld with astonishment the progress of subterranean vegetation. The seeds which the birds carry into the grotto to feed their young, spring up wherever they fix in the mould which covers the calcareous incrustations. Blanched stalks, with some half-formed leaves, had risen to the height of two feet. It was impossible to ascertain the species of these plants, their form, colour, and aspect having been changed by the absence of light. These traces of organization amidst darkness forcibly excited the curiosity of the natives, who examined them with silent meditation inspired by a place they seemed to dread. They evidently regarded these subterranean plants, pale and deformed, as phantoms banished from the face of the earth. To me the scene recalled one of the happiest periods of my early youth, a long abode in the mines of Freyberg, where I made experiments on the effects of blanching (*étiolement*), which are very different, according as the air is pure or overcharged with hydrogen or azote.

The missionaries, with all their authority, could not prevail on the Indians to penetrate farther into the cavern. As the roof became lower the cries of the guacharos were more and more shrill. We were obliged to yield to the pusillanimity of our guides, and trace back our steps. The appearance of the cavern was however very uniform. We found that a bishop of St. Thomas of Guiana had gone farther than ourselves. He had measured nearly 2500 feet from the mouth

* *Opfer-erde* of the cavern of Höhle Berg (or Hole Mountain,—a mountain pierced entirely through).