

ened anew, there fell a few large drops of rain, and the storm dispersed without our hearing any thunder. Meanwhile it was curious to observe the effect of several black, isolated, and very low clouds, which passed the zenith. We felt the force of the wind augment or diminish progressively, according as small bodies of vesicular vapour approached or receded, while the electrometers, furnished with a long metallic rod and lighted match, showed no change of electric tension in the lower strata of the air. It is by help of these squalls, which alternate with dead calms, that the passage from the Canary Islands to the Antilles, or southern coast of America, is made in the months of June and July.

Some Spanish navigators have lately proposed going to the West Indies and the coasts of Terra-Firma by a course different from that which was taken by Columbus. They advise, instead of steering directly to the south in search of the trade-winds, to change both latitude and longitude, in a diagonal line from Cape St. Vincent to America. This method, which shortens the way, cutting the tropic nearly twenty degrees west of the point where it is commonly cut by pilots, was several times successfully adopted by Admiral Gravina. That able commander, who fell at the battle of Trafalgar, arrived in 1802 at St. Domingo, by the oblique passage, several days before the French fleet, though orders of the court of Madrid would have forced him to enter Ferrol with his squadron, and stop there some time.

This new system of navigation shortens the passage from Cadiz to Cumana one-twentieth; but as the tropic is attained only at the longitude of forty degrees, the chance of meeting with contrary winds, which blow sometimes from the south, and at other times from the south-west, is more unfavourable. In the old system, the disadvantage of making a longer passage is compensated by the certainty of catching the trade-winds in a shorter space of time, and keeping them the greater part of the passage. At the time of my abode in the Spanish colonies, I witnessed the arrival of several merchant-ships, which from the fear of privateers had chosen the oblique course, and had had a very short passage.

Nothing can equal the beauty and mildness of the climate