

CHAPTER IV.

First abode at Cumana.—Banks of the Manzanares.

ON the 16th of July, 1799, at break of day, we beheld a verdant coast, of picturesque aspect. The mountains of New Andalusia, half-veiled by mists, bounded the horizon to the south. The city of Cumana and its castle appeared between groups of cocoa-trees. We anchored in the port about nine in the morning, forty-one days after our departure from Corunna; the sick dragged themselves on deck to enjoy the sight of a land which was to put an end to their sufferings. Our eyes were fixed on the groups of cocoa-trees which border the river: their trunks, more than sixty feet high, towered over every object in the landscape. The plain was covered with the tufts of Cassia, Caper, and those arborescent mimosas, which, like the pine of Italy, spread their branches in the form of an umbrella. The pinnated leaves of the palms were conspicuous on the azure sky, the clearness of which was unsullied by any trace of vapour. The sun was ascending rapidly toward the zenith. A dazzling light was spread through the air, along the whitish hills strewed with cylindric cactuses, and over a sea ever calm, the shores of which were peopled with alcatras,* egrets, and flamingoes. The splendour of the day, the vivid colouring of the vegetable world, the forms of the plants, the varied plumage of the birds, everything was stamped with the grand character of nature in the equinoctial regions.

The city of Cumana, the capital of New Andalusia, is a mile distant from the *embarcadero*, or the battery of the Boca, where we landed, after having passed the bar of the Manzanares. We had to cross a vast plain, called el Salado, which divides the suburb of the Guayquerias from the sea-coast. The excessive heat of the atmosphere was augmented by the reverberation of the soil, partly destitute of vegetation. The centigrade thermometer, plunged into the white sand, rose to 37·7°. In the small pools of salt water it kept at 30·5°, while the heat of the ocean, at its surface,

* A brown pelican, of the size of a swan. (*Pelicanus fuscus*, *Lin.*)