

The castle is only thirty toises above the level of the water in the gulf of Cariaco. Standing on a naked and calcareous hill, it commands the town, and has a very picturesque effect when viewed from a vessel entering the port. It forms a bright object against the dark curtains of those mountains which raise their summits to the clouds, and of which the vaporous and bluish tint blends with the azure sky. On descending from Fort San Antonio to the south-west, we find on the slope of the same rock the ruins of the old castle of Santa Maria. This site is delightful to those who wish to enjoy at the approach of sunset the freshness of the breeze and the view of the gulf. The lofty summits of the island of Margareta are seen above the rocky coast of the isthmus of Araya, and towards the west the small islands of Caracas, Picuitá, and Boracha, recall to mind the catastrophes that have overwhelmed the coasts of Terra Firma. These islets resemble fortifications, and from the effect of the mirage (while the inferior strata of the air, the ocean, and the soil, are unequally heated by the sun), their points appear raised like the extremity of the great promontories of the coast. It is pleasing, during the day, to observe these inconstant phenomena; we see, as night approaches, these stony masses which had been suspended in the air, settle down on their bases; and the luminary, whose presence vivifies organic nature, seems by the variable inflection of its rays to impress motion on the stable rock, and give an undulating movement to plains covered with arid sands.*

The town of Cumana, properly so called, occupies the ground lying between the castle of San Antonio and the small rivers of Manzanares and Santa Catalina. The Delta, formed by the bifurcation of the first of these rivers, is a fertile plain covered with Mammées, Sapotas (achras), plantains, and other plants cultivated in the gardens or charas of the Indians. The town has no remarkable edifice, and the frequency of earthquakes forbids such embellishments. It is true, that strong shocks occur less frequently in a given time at Cumana than at Quito, where we nevertheless find

* The real cause of the mirage, or the extraordinary refraction which the rays undergo when strata of air of different densities lie over each other, was guessed at by Hooke.—See his Posthumous Works, p. 472.