

recent formations. Majestic forests cover this Cordillera of the interior, and they are joined by a woody vale to the open clayey lands and salt marshes of the environs of Cumana. A few birds of considerable size contribute to give a peculiar character to these countries. On the seashore, and in the gulf, we find flocks of fishing herons, and alcatras of a very unwieldy form, which swim, like the swan, raising their wings. Nearer the habitation of man, thousands of galinazo vultures, the jackals of the winged tribe, are ever busy in disinterring the carcasses of animals.* A gulf, containing hot and submarine springs, divides the secondary from the primary and schistose rocks of the peninsula of Araya. Each of these coasts is washed by a tranquil sea, of azure tint, and always gently agitated by a breeze from one quarter. A bright clear sky, with a few light clouds at sunset, reposes on the ocean, on the treeless peninsula, and on the plains of Cumana, while we see the storms accumulate and descend in fertile showers among the inland mountains. Thus on these coasts, as well as at the foot of the Andes, the earth and the sky present the extremes of clear weather and fogs, of drought and torrents of rain, of absolute nudity and never-ceasing verdure.

The analogies which we have just indicated, between the sea-coasts of New Andalusia and those of Peru, extend also to the recurrence of earthquakes, and the limits which nature seems to have prescribed to these phenomena. We have ourselves felt very violent shocks at Cumana; and we learned on the spot, the most minute circumstances that accompanied the great catastrophe of the 14th December, 1797.

It is a very generally received opinion on the coasts of Cumana, and in the island of Margareta, that the gulf of Cariaco owes its existence to a rent of the continent attended by an irruption of the sea. The remembrance of that great event was preserved among the Indians to the end of the fifteenth century; and it is related that, at the time of the third voyage of Christopher Columbus, the natives mentioned it as of very recent date. In 1530, the inhabitants were alarmed by new shocks on the coasts of Paria and Cumana. The land was inundated by the sea, and the small fort, built by James Castellon at New Toledo,† was entirely destroyed. At

* Buffon, *Hist. Nat. des Oiseaux*, tom. i., p. 114.

† This was the first name given to the city of Cumana.—Girolamo