

CHAPTER VII.

Convent of Caripe.—Cavern of the Guacharo.—Nocturnal Birds.

AN alley of perseas led us to the Hospital of the Aragonese Capuchins. We stopped near a cross of Brazil-wood, erected in the midst of a square, and surrounded with benches, on which the infirm monks seat themselves to tell their rosaries. The convent is backed by an enormous wall of perpendicular rock, covered with thick vegetation. The stone, which is of resplendent whiteness, appears only here and there between the foliage. It is difficult to imagine a more picturesque spot. It recalled forcibly to my remembrance the valleys of Derbyshire, and the cavernous mountains of Muggendorf, in Franconia. Instead of the beeches and maple trees of Europe we here find the statelier forms of the ceiba and the palm-tree, the praga and irasse. Numberless springs gush from the sides of the rocks which encircle the basin of Caripe, and of which the abrupt slopes present, towards the south, profiles of a thousand feet in height. These springs issue, for the most part, from a few narrow crevices. The humidity which they spread around favours the growth of the great trees; and the natives, who love solitary places, form their *conucos* along the sides of these crevices. Plantains and papaw trees are grouped together with groves of arborescent fern; and this mixture of wild and cultivated plants gives the place a peculiar charm. Springs are distinguished from afar, on the naked flanks of the mountains, by tufted masses of vegetation* which at first sight seem suspended from the rocks, and

* Among the interesting plants of the valley of Caripe, we found for the first time a calidium, the trunk of which was twenty feet high (*C. arbo-reum*); the *Mikania micrantha*, which may probably possess some of the alexipharmic properties of the famous *guaco* of the Choco; the *Bauhinia obtusifolia*, a very large tree, called *guarapa* by the Indians; the *Weinmannia glabra*; a tree *psychotria*, the capsules of which, when rubbed between the fingers, emit a very agreeable orange smell; the *Dorstenia Houstoni* (*raiz de resfriado*); the *Martynia Craniolaria*, the white flowers of which are six or seven inches long; a *scrophularia*, having the aspect of the *Verbascum miconi*, and the leaves of which, all radical and hairy, are marked with silvery glands.