

affirm or deny whatever the monks pleased: and that wily civility, to which the least cultivated Indian is no stranger, induced them sometimes to give to their answers the turn that seemed to be suggested by our questions. Travellers cannot be enough on their guard against this officious assent, when they seek to confirm their own opinions by the testimony of the natives. To put an Indian alcalde to the proof, I asked him one day, whether he did not think the little river of Caripe, which issues from the cavern of the Guacharo, returned into it on the opposite side by some unknown entrance, after having ascended the slope of the mountain. The Indian seemed gravely to reflect on the subject, and then answered, by way of supporting my hypothesis: "How else, if it were not so, would there always be water in the bed of the river at the mouth of the cavern?"

The Chaymas are very dull in comprehending anything relating to numerical facts. I never knew one of these people who might not have been made to say that he was either eighteen or sixty years of age. Mr. Marsden observed the same peculiarity in the Malays of Sumatra, though they have been civilized more than five centuries. The Chayma language contains words which express pretty large numbers, yet few Indians know how to apply them; and having felt, from their intercourse with the missionaries, the necessity of so doing, the more intelligent among them count in Spanish, but apparently with great effort of mind, as far as thirty, or perhaps fifty. The same persons, however, cannot count in the Chayma language beyond five or six. It is natural that they should employ in preference the words of a language in which they have been taught the series of units and tens. Since learned Europeans have not disdained to study the structure of the idioms of America with the same care as they study those of the Semitic languages, and of the Greek and Latin, they no longer attribute to the imperfection of a language, what belongs to the rudeness of the nation. It is acknowledged, that almost everywhere the Indian idioms display greater richness, and more delicate gradations, than might be supposed from the uncultivated state of the people by whom they are spoken. I am far from placing the languages of the New World in the same rank with the finest languages of Asia.