

and M. Blandin, were men of agreeable manners. These plantations were situated opposite the Silla de Caracas. Surveying, by a telescope, the steep declivity of the mountains, and the form of the two peaks by which it is terminated, we could form an idea of the difficulties we should have to encounter in reaching its summit. Angles of elevation, taken with the sextant at our house, had led me to believe that the summit was not so high above sea-level as the great square of Quito. This estimate was far from corresponding with the notions entertained by the inhabitants of the city. Mountains which command great towns, have acquired, from that very circumstance, an extraordinary celebrity in both continents. Long before they have been accurately measured, a conventional height is assigned to them; and to entertain the least doubt respecting that height is to wound a national prejudice.

The captain-general, Señor de Guevara, directed the *teniente* of Chacao to furnish us with guides to conduct us on our ascent of the Silla. These guides were negroes, and they knew something of the path leading over the ridge of the mountain, near the western peak of the Silla. This path is frequented by smugglers, but neither the guides, nor the most experienced of the militia, accustomed to pursue the smugglers in these wild spots, had been on the eastern peak, forming the most elevated summit of the Silla. During the whole month of December, the mountain (of which the angles of elevation made me acquainted with the effects of the terrestrial refractions) had appeared only five times free of clouds. In this season two serene days seldom succeed each other, and we were therefore advised not to choose a clear day for our excursion, but rather a time when, the clouds not being elevated, we might hope, after having crossed the first layer of vapours uniformly spread, to enter into a dry and transparent air. We passed the night of the 2d of January in the Estancia de Gallegos, a plantation of coffee-trees, near which the little river of Chacaito, flowing in a luxuriantly shaded ravine, forms some fine cascades in descending the mountains. The night was pretty clear; and though on the day preceding a fatiguing journey it might have been well to have enjoyed some repose, M. Bonpland and I passed the whole night in watching three