

collect, and on the accuracy of which I can rely, respecting the earthquake of the 26th of March, 1812. By that catastrophe the town of Caracas was destroyed, and more than twenty thousand persons perished throughout the extent of the province of Venezuela. The intercourse which I have kept up with persons of all classes has enabled me to compare the description given by many eye-witnesses, and to interrogate them on objects that may throw light on physical science in general. The traveller, as the historian of nature, should verify the dates of great catastrophes, examine their connection and their mutual relations, and should mark in the rapid course of ages, in the continual progress of successive changes, those fixed points with which other catastrophes may one day be compared. All epochs are proximate to each other in the immensity of time comprehended in the history of nature. Years which have passed away seem but a few instants; and the physical descriptions of a country, even when they offer subjects of no very powerful and general interest, have at least the advantage of never becoming old. Similar considerations, no doubt, led M. de la Condamine to describe in his *Voyage à l'Equateur*, the memorable eruptions of the volcano of Cotopaxi,* which took place long after his departure from Quito. I feel the less hesitation in following the example of that celebrated traveller, as the events I am about to relate will help to elucidate the theory of volcanic reaction, or the influence of a system of volcanos on a vast space of circumjacent territory.

At the time when M. Bonpland and myself visited the provinces of New Andalusia, New Barcelona, and Caracas, it was generally believed that the most eastern parts of those coasts were especially exposed to the destructive effects of earthquakes. The inhabitants of Cumana dreaded the valley of Caracas, on account of its damp and variable climate, and its gloomy and misty sky; whilst the inhabitants of the temperate valley regarded Cumana as a town whose inhabitants incessantly inhaled a burning atmosphere, and whose soil was periodically agitated by violent commotions. Unmindful of the overthrow of Riobamba and other very

* Those of the 30th of November, 1744, and of the 3rd of September, 1750.