

EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THE increasing interest attached to all that part of the American Continent situated within and near the tropics, has suggested the publication of the present edition of Humboldt's celebrated work, as a portion of the SCIENTIFIC LIBRARY.

Prior to the travels of Humboldt and Bonpland, the countries described in the following narrative were but imperfectly known to Europeans. For our partial acquaintance with them we were chiefly indebted to the early navigators, and to some of the followers of the Spanish Conquistadores. The intrepid men whose courage and enterprise prompted them to explore unknown seas for the discovery of a New World, have left behind them narratives of their adventures, and descriptions of the strange lands and people they visited, which must ever be perused with curiosity and interest; and some of the followers of Pizarro and Cortez, as well as many learned Spaniards who proceeded to South America soon after the conquest, were the authors of historical and other works of high value. But these writings of a past age, however curious and interesting, are deficient in that spirit of scientific investigation which enhances the importance and utility of accounts of travels in distant regions. In more recent times, the researches of La Condamine tended in a most important degree to promote geographical knowledge; and he, as well as other eminent botanists who visited the coasts of South