

# INTRODUCTION,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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MANY years have elapsed since I quitted Europe, to explore the interior of the New Continent. Devoted from my earliest youth to the study of nature, feeling with enthusiasm the wild beauties of a country guarded by mountains and shaded by ancient forests, I experienced in my travels, enjoyments which have amply compensated for the privations inseparable from a laborious and often agitated life. These enjoyments, which I endeavoured to impart to my readers in my 'Remarks upon the Steppes,' and in the 'Essay on the Physiognomy of Plants,' were not the only fruits I reaped from an undertaking formed with the design of contributing to the progress of natural philosophy. I had long prepared myself for the observations which were the principal object of my journey to the torrid zone. I was provided with instruments of easy and convenient use, constructed by the ablest makers, and I enjoyed the special protection of a government which, far from presenting obstacles to my investigations, constantly honoured me with every mark of regard and confidence. I was aided by a courageous and enlightened friend, and it was singularly propitious to the success of our participated labour, that the zeal and equanimity of that friend never failed, amidst the fatigues and dangers to which we were sometimes exposed.

Under these favourable circumstances, traversing regions which for ages have remained almost unknown to most of the nations of Europe, I might add even to Spain, M. Bonpland and myself collected a considerable number of materials, the publication of which may throw some light on the history of nations, and advance the study of nature.

I had in view a two-fold purpose in the travels of which I now publish the historical narrative. I wished to make known the countries I had visited; and to collect such facts as are fitted to elucidate a science of which we as yet possess scarcely the outline, and which has been vaguely donominated Natural His-