

between the rocks of the two hemispheres; on the physical constitution of the air in the equinoctial regions, &c. I had left Europe with the firm intention of not writing what is usually called the historical narrative of a journey, but to publish the fruit of my inquiries in works merely descriptive; and I had arranged the facts, not in the order in which they successively presented themselves, but according to the relation they bore to each other. Amidst the overwhelming majesty of Nature, and the stupendous objects she presents at every step, the traveller is little disposed to record in his journal matters which relate only to himself, and the ordinary details of life.

I composed a very brief itinerary during the course of my excursions on the rivers of South America, and in my long journies by land. I regularly described (and almost always on the spot) the visits I made to the summits of volcanos, or mountains remarkable for their height; but the entries in my journal were interrupted whenever I resided in a town, or when other occupations prevented me from continuing a work which I considered as having only a secondary interest. Whenever I wrote in my journal, I had no other motive than the preservation of some of those fugitive ideas which present themselves to a naturalist, whose life is almost wholly passed in the open air. I wished to make a temporary collection of such facts as I had not then leisure to class, and note down the first impressions, whether agreeable or painful, which I received from nature or from man. Far from thinking at the time that those pages thus hurriedly written would form the basis of an extensive work to be offered to the public, it appeared to me, that my journal, though it might furnish certain data useful to science, would present very few of those incidents, the recital of which constitutes the principal charm of an itinerary.

The difficulties I have experienced since my return, in the composition of a considerable number of treatises, for the purpose of making known certain classes of phenomena, insensibly overcame my repugnance to write the narrative of my journey. In undertaking this task, I have been guided by the advice of many estimable persons, who honour me with their friendship. I also perceived that such a preference is given to this sort of composition, that scientific men, after having presented in an isolated form the account of their researches on the productions, the manners, and the political state of the countries through which they have passed, imagine that they have not fulfilled their engagements with the public, till they have written their itinerary.

An historical narrative embraces two very distinct objects; the greater or the less important events connected with the purpose of the traveller, and the observations he has made during his journey. The unity of composition also, which distinguishes