

flowers. But the view of the lake and of the richly cultivated neighbouring valleys is beautiful, and their aspect is wonderful after sunset, when thousands of aquatic birds, herons, flamingoes, and wild ducks cross the lake to roost in the islands, and the broad zone of mountains which surrounds the horizon is covered with fire. The inhabitants, as we have already mentioned, burn the meadows in order to produce fresher and finer grass. Gramineous plants abound, especially at the summit of the chain; and those vast conflagrations extend sometimes the length of a thousand toises, and appear like streams of lava overflowing the ridge of the mountains. When reposing on the banks of the lake to enjoy the soft freshness of the air in one of those beautiful evenings peculiar to the tropics, it is delightful to contemplate in the waves as they beat the shore, the reflection of the red fires that illumine the horizon.

Among the plants which grow on the rocky islands of the lake of Valencia, many have been believed to be peculiar to those spots, because till now they have not been discovered elsewhere. Such are the *papaw-trees of the lake*; and the tomato\* of the island of Cura. The latter differs from our *Solanum lycopersicum*; the fruit is round and small, but has a fine flavour; it is now cultivated at La Victoria, at Nueva Valencia, and everywhere in the valleys of Aragua. The papaw-tree of the lake (*papaya de la laguna*) abounds also in the island of Cura and at Cabo Blanco; its trunk shoots higher than that of the common papaw (*Carica papaya*), but its fruit is only half as large, perfectly spherical, without projecting ribs, and four or five inches in diameter. When cut open it is found quite filled with seeds, and without those hollow places which occur constantly in the common papaw. The taste of this fruit, of which I have often eaten, is extremely sweet.† I know not whether it be a variety of the *Carica microcarpa*, described by Jacquin.

The environs of the lake are insalubrious only in times of great drought, when the waters in their retreat leave a

\* The tomatos are cultivated, as well as the papaw-tree of the lake, in the Botanical Garden of Berlin, to which I had sent some seeds.

† The people of the country attribute to it an astringent quality, and call it *tapaculo*.