

Indian of Javita to us gravely, "where there are no marshes; because the water ceases to collect when you imprudently kill the serpents that attract it."

We suffered greatly from the heat in crossing the Mesa de Calabozo. The temperature of the air augmented sensibly every time that the wind began to blow. The air was loaded with dust; and during these gusts the thermometer rose to 40° or 41°. We went slowly forward, for it would have been dangerous to leave the mules that carried our instruments. Our guides advised us to fill our hats with the leaves of the *rhopala*, to diminish the action of the solar rays on the hair and the crown of the head. We found relief from this expedient, which was particularly agreeable, when we could procure the thick leaves of the *pothos* or some other similar plant.

It is impossible to cross these burning plains, without inquiring whether they have always been in the same state; or whether they have been stripped of their vegetation by some revolution of nature. The stratum of mould now found on them is in fact very thin. The natives believe that the *palmares* and the *chaparales* (the little groves of palm-trees and *rhopala*) were more frequent and more extensive before the arrival of the Spaniards. Since the Llanos have been inhabited and peopled with cattle become wild, the savannah is often set on fire, in order to ameliorate the pasturage. Groups of scattered trees are accidentally destroyed with the grasses. The plains were no doubt less bare in the fifteenth century, than they now are; yet the first Conquistadores, who came from Coro, described them then as savannahs, where nothing could be perceived but the sky and the turf, generally destitute of trees, and difficult to traverse on account of the reverberation of heat from the soil. Why does not the great forest of the Orinoco extend to the north, on the left bank of that river? Why does it not fill that vast space that reaches as far as the Cordillera of the coast, and which is fertilized by numerous rivers? These questions are connected with all that relates to the history of our planet. If, indulging in geological reveries, we suppose that the steppes of America, and the desert of Sahara, have been stripped of their vegetation by an irruption of the ocean, or that they formed originally the