

morning we pursued our way over low grounds, often inundated. In the season of rains, a boat may be navigated, as on a lake, between the Guarico and the Apure. We arrived on the 27th of March at the Villa de San Fernando, the capital of the Mission of the Capuchins in the province of Varinas. This was the termination of our journey over the Llanos; for we passed the three months of April, May, and June on the rivers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

San Fernando de Apure.—Intertwinings and Bifurcations of the Rivers Apure and Arauca.—Navigation on the Rio Apure.

TILL the second half of the eighteenth century the names of the great rivers Apure, Arauca, and Meta were scarcely known in Europe: certainly less than they had been in the two preceding centuries, when the valiant Felipe de Urro and the conquerors of Tocuyo traversed the Llanos, to seek, beyond the Apure, the great legendary city of El Dorado, and the rich country of the Omeguas, the Timbuctoo of the New Continent. Such daring expeditions could not be carried out without all the apparatus of war; and the weapons, which had been destined for the defence of the new colonists, were employed without intermission against the unhappy natives. When more peaceful times succeeded to those of violence and public calamity, two powerful Indian tribes, the Cabres and the Caribs of the Orinoco, made themselves masters of the country which the Conquistadores had ceased to ravage. None but poor monks were then permitted to advance to the south of the steppes. Beyond the Uritucu an unknown world opened to the Spanish colonists; and the descendants of those intrepid warriors who had extended their conquests from Peru to the coasts of New Grenada and the mouth of the Amazon, knew not the roads that lead from Coro to the Rio Meta. The shore of Venezuela remained a separate country; and the slow conquests of the Jesuit missionaries were successful only by skirting the banks of the Orinoco. These