

figures of stars, of the sun, of tigers, and of crocodiles, which we found traced upon the rocks in spots now uninhabited, appeared to me in no way to denote the objects of worship of those nations. Between the banks of the Cassiquiare and the Orinoco, between Encaramada, the Capuchino, and Caycara, these hieroglyphic figures are often seen at great heights, on rocky cliffs which could be accessible only by constructing very lofty scaffolds. When the natives are asked how those figures could have been sculptured, they answer with a smile, as if relating a fact of which only a white man could be ignorant, that "at the period of the great waters, their fathers went to that height in boats."

These ancient traditions of the human race, which we find dispersed over the whole surface of the globe, like the relics of a vast shipwreck, are highly interesting in the philosophical study of our own species. Like certain families of the vegetable kingdom, which, notwithstanding the diversity of climates and the influence of heights, retain the impression of a common type, the traditions of nations respecting the origin of the world, display everywhere the same physiognomy, and preserve features of resemblance that fill us with astonishment. How many different tongues, belonging to branches that appear totally distinct, transmit to us the same facts! The traditions concerning races that have been destroyed, and the renewal of nature, scarcely vary in reality, though every nation gives them a local colouring. In the great continents, as in the smallest islands of the Pacific Ocean, it is always on the loftiest and nearest mountain that the remains of the human race have been saved; and this event appears the more recent, in proportion as the nations are uncultivated, and as the knowledge they have of their own existence has no very remote date. After having studied with attention the Mexican monuments anterior to the discovery of the New World; after having penetrated into the forests of the Orinoco, and observed the diminutive size of the European establishments, their solitude, and the state of the tribes that have remained independent; we cannot allow ourselves to attribute the analogies just cited to the influence exercised by the missionaries, and by Christianity, on the national traditions. Nor is it more probable, that the discovery of sea-shells on