

had given rise among the Whites. The missionary invited us to partake a frugal repast of fish and plantains. He told us that he had come to encamp with the Indians during the time of the 'harvest of eggs,' "to celebrate mass every morning in the open air, to procure the oil necessary for the church-lamps, and especially to govern this mixed republic (república de Indios y Castellanos) in which every one wished to profit singly by what God had granted to all."

We made the tour of the island, accompanied by the missionary and by a *pulpero*, who boasted of having, for ten successive years, visited the camp of the Indians, and attended the turtle-fishery. We were on a plain of sand perfectly smooth; and were told that, as far as we could see along the beach, turtles' eggs were concealed under a layer of earth. The missionary carried a long pole in his hand. He showed us, that by means of this pole, the extent of the stratum of eggs could be determined as accurately as the miner determines the limits of a bed of marl, of bog iron-ore, or of coal. On thrusting the rod perpendicularly into the ground, the sudden want of resistance shows that the cavity or layer of loose earth containing the eggs, has been reached. We saw that the stratum is generally spread with so much uniformity, that the pole finds it everywhere in a radius of ten toises around any given spot. Here they talk continually of square perches of eggs; it is like a mining-country, divided into lots, and worked with the greatest regularity. The stratum of eggs, however, is far from covering the whole island: they are not found wherever the ground rises abruptly, because the turtle cannot mount heights. I related to my guides the emphatic description of Father Gumilla, who asserts, that the shores of the Orinoco contain fewer grains of sand than the river contains turtles; and that these animals would prevent vessels from advancing, if men and tigers did not annually destroy so great a number.* "*Son cuentos de frailes,*" "they are

* "It would be as difficult to count the grains of sand on the shores of the Orinoco, as to count the immense number of tortoises which inhabit its margins and waters. Were it not for the vast consumption of tortoises and their eggs, the river Orinoco, despite its great magnitude, would be unnavigable, for vessels would be impeded by the enormous multitude of the tortoises."—Gumilla, *Orinoco Illustrata*, vol. i. pp. 331-336.