

at a very early hour, and who call them 'mad tortoises.' Notwithstanding the rapidity of their movements, they are then easily caught with the hand.

The three encampments formed by the Indians, in the places indicated above, begin about the end of March or commencement of April. The gathering of the eggs is conducted in a uniform manner, and with that regularity which characterises all monastic institutions. Before the arrival of the missionaries on the banks of the river, the Indians profited much less from a production which nature has supplied in such abundance. Every tribe searched the beach in its own way; and an immense number of eggs were uselessly broken, because they were not dug up with precaution, and more eggs were uncovered than could be carried away. It was like a mine worked by unskilful hands. The Jesuits have the merit of having reduced this operation to regularity; and though the Franciscan monks, who succeeded the Jesuits in the Missions of the Orinoco, boast of having followed the example of their predecessors, they unhappily do not effect all that prudence requires. The Jesuits did not suffer the whole beach to be searched; they left a part untouched, from the fear of seeing the breed of *arrau* tortoises, if not destroyed, at least considerably diminished. The whole beach is now dug up without reserve; and accordingly it seems to be perceived that the gathering is less productive from year to year.

When the camp is formed, the missionary of Uruana names his lieutenant, or commissary, who divides the ground where the eggs are found into different portions, according to the number of the Indian tribes who take part in the gathering. They are all 'Indians of Missions,' as naked and rude as the 'Indians of the woods;' though they are called *reducidos* and *neofitos*, because they go to church at the sound of the bell, and have learned to kneel down during the consecration of the host.

The lieutenant (comissionado del Padre) begins his operations by sounding. He examines by means of a long wooden pole or a cane of bamboo, how far the stratum of eggs extends. This stratum, according to our measurements, extended to the distance of one hundred and twenty feet from the shore. Its average depth is three feet. The commis-