

Cataracts seated on the ground, playing at cards, and smoking tobacco in long pipes. Their ample blue garments, their shaven heads, and their long beards, might have led us to mistake them for natives of the East. These poor priests received us in the kindest manner, giving us every information necessary for the continuation of our voyage. They had suffered from tertian fever for some months; and their pale and emaciated aspect easily convinced us that the countries we were about to visit were not without danger to the health of travellers.

The Indian pilot, who had brought us from San Fernando de Apure as far as the shore of Pararuma, was unacquainted with the passage of the rapids* of the Orinoco, and would not undertake to conduct our bark any farther. We were obliged to conform to his will. Happily for us, the missionary of Carichana consented to sell us a fine canoe at a very moderate price: and Father Bernardo Zea, missionary of the Atures and Maypures near the great cataracts, offered, though still unwell, to accompany us as far as the frontiers of Brazil. The number of natives who can assist in guiding boats through the *Raudales* is so inconsiderable that, but for the presence of the monk, we should have risked spending whole weeks in these humid and unhealthy regions. On the banks of the Orinoco, the forests of the Rio Negro are considered as delicious spots. The air is indeed cooler and more healthful. The river is free from crocodiles; one may bathe without apprehension, and by night as well as by day there is less torment from the sting of insects than on the Orinoco. Father Zea hoped to re-establish his health by visiting the Missions of Rio Negro. He talked of those places with that enthusiasm which is felt in all the colonies of South America for everything far off.

The assemblage of Indians at Pararuma again excited in us that interest, which everywhere attaches man in a cultivated state to the study of man in a savage condition, and the successive development of his intellectual faculties. How difficult to recognize in this infancy of society, in this assemblage of dull, silent, inanimate Indians, the primitive character of our species! Human nature does not here manifest those features of artless simplicity, of which

* Little cascades (chorros raudalitos).