

interpreter. Every mission has at least two interpreters (lenguarazes). They are Indians, a little less stupid than the rest, through whose medium the missionaries of the Orinoco, who now very rarely give themselves the trouble of studying the idioms of the country, communicate with the neophytes. These interpreters attended us in all our herborizations; but they rather understand than speak Castilian. With their indolent indifference, they answer us by chance, but always with an officious smile, "Yes, Father; no, Father," to every question addressed to them.

The vexation that arises from such a style of conversation continued for months may easily be conceived, when you wish to be enlightened upon objects in which you take the most lively interest. We were often forced to employ several interpreters at a time, and several successive translators, in order to communicate with the natives.*

"After leaving my Mission," said the good monk of Uruana, "you will travel like mutes." This prediction was nearly accomplished; and, not to lose the advantage we might derive from intercourse even with the rudest Indians, we sometimes preferred the language of signs. When a native perceives that you will not employ an interpreter; when you interrogate him directly, showing him the objects; he rouses himself from his habitual apathy, and manifests an extraordinary capacity to make himself comprehended. He varies his signs, pronounces his words slowly, and repeats them without being desired. The consequence conferred upon him, in suffering yourself to be instructed by him, flatters his self-love. This facility in making himself comprehended is particularly remarkable in the independent Indian. It cannot be doubted that direct intercourse with the natives is more instructive and more certain than the communication by interpreters, provided the questions be

* To form a just idea of the perplexity of these communications by interpreters, we may recollect that, in the expedition of Lewis and Clarke to the river Columbia, in order to converse with the Chopunnish Indians, Captain Lewis addressed one of his men in English; that man translated the question into French to Chaboneau; Chaboneau translated it to his Indian wife in Minnetaree; the woman translated it into Shoshonee to a prisoner; and the prisoner translated it into Chopunnish. It may be feared that the sense of the question was a little altered by these successive translations.