

had themselves invented all these exaggerated fictions; they derived them in great part from the recitals of the Indians. A fondness for narration prevails in the Missions, as it does at sea, in the East, and in every place where the mind seeks amusement. A missionary, from his vocation, is not inclined to scepticism; he imprints on his memory what the natives have so often repeated to him; and, when returned to Europe, and restored to the civilized world, he finds a pleasure in creating astonishment by a recital of facts which he thinks he has collected, and by an animated description of remote things. These stories, which the Spanish colonists call 'tales of travellers and of monks' (*cuentos de viageros y frailes*), increase in improbability in proportion as you increase your distance from the forests of the Orinoco, and approach the coasts inhabited by the whites. When, at Cumana, Nueva Barcelona, and other seaports which have frequent communication with the Missions, you betray any sign of incredulity, you are reduced to silence by these few words: "The fathers have seen it, but far above the Great Cataracts (*mas arriba de los Raudales*)."

On the 15th of April, we left the island of Panumana at four in the morning, two hours before sunrise. The sky was in great part obscured, and lightnings flashed over dense clouds at more than forty degrees of elevation. We were surprised at not hearing thunder; but possibly this was owing to the prodigious height of the storm? It appears to us, that in Europe the electric flashes without thunder, vaguely called heat-lightning, are seen generally nearer the horizon. Under a cloudy sky, that sent back the radiant caloric of the soil, the heat was stifling; not a breath of wind agitated the foliage of the trees. The jaguars, as usual, had crossed the arm of the Orinoco by which we were separated from the shore, and we heard their cries extremely near. During the night the Indians had advised us to quit our station in the open air, and retire to a deserted hut belonging to the *conucos* of the inhabitants of Atures. They had taken care to barricade the opening with planks, a precaution which seemed to us superfluous; but near the Cataracts tigers are very numerous, and two years before, in these very *conucos* of Panumana, an Indian returning to