

the great cataracts are not found near the sources of the rivers. After a tranquil course of more than one hundred and sixty leagues from the little Raudal of Guaharibos, east of Esmeralda, as far as the mountains of Sipapu, the river, augmented by the waters of the Jao, the Ventuari, the Atabapo, and the Guaviare, suddenly changes its primitive direction from east to west, and runs from south to north: then, in crossing the land-strait* in the plains of Meta, meets the advanced buttresses of the Cordillera of Parima. This obstacle causes cataracts far more considerable, and presents greater impediments to navigation, than all the Pongos of the Upper Marañon, because they are proportionally nearer to the mouth of the river. These geographical details serve to prove, in the instances of the two greatest rivers of the New World, 1st, that it cannot be ascertained in an absolute manner that, beyond a certain number of toises, or a certain height above the level of the sea, rivers are not navigable; 2ndly, that the rapids are not always occasioned, as several treatises of general topography affirm, by the height of the first obstacles, by the first lines of ridges which the waters have to surmount near their sources.

The most northern of the great cataracts of the Orinoco is the only one bounded on each side by lofty mountains. The left bank of the river is generally lower, but it makes part of a plane which rises again west of Atures, towards the Peak of Uniana, a pyramid nearly three thousand feet high, and placed on a wall of rock with steep slopes. The situation of this solitary peak in the plain contributes to render its aspect more imposing and majestic. Near the Mission, in the country which surrounds the cataract, the aspect of the landscape varies at every step. Within a small space we find all that is most rude and gloomy in nature, united with an open country and lovely pastoral scenery. In the physical, as in the moral world, the contrast of effects, the comparison of what is powerful and menacing with what is soft and peaceful, is a never-failing source of our pleasures and our emotions.

I shall here repeat some scattered features of a picture

* This strait, which I have several times mentioned, is formed by the Cordilleras of the Andes of New Granada, and the Cordillera of Parima.