

of several German and Spanish Jesuits, who in 1734 fell victims to their zeal for religion, by the hands of the Caribs on the now desert banks of the Vichada.

Having passed the Caño Pirajavi on the east, and then a small river on the west, which issues, as the Indians say, from a lake called Nao, we rested for the night on the shore of the Orinoco, at the mouth of the Zama, a very considerable river, but as little known as the Vichada. Notwithstanding the 'black waters' of the Zama, we suffered greatly from insects. The night was beautiful, without a breath of wind in the lower regions of the atmosphere, but towards two in the morning we saw thick clouds crossing the zenith rapidly from east to west. When, declining toward the horizon, they traversed the great nebulae of Sagittarius and the Ship, they appeared of a dark blue. The light of the nebulae is never more splendid than when they are in part covered by sweeping clouds. We observe the same phenomenon in Europe in the Milky Way, in the aurora borealis when it beams with a silvery light; and at the rising and setting of the sun in that part of the sky that is whitened\* from causes which philosophers have not yet sufficiently explained.

The vast tract of country lying between the Meta, the Vichada, and the Guaviare, is altogether unknown a league from the banks; but it is believed to be inhabited by wild Indians of the tribe of Chiricoas, who fortunately build no boats. Formerly, when the Caribs, and their enemies the Cabres, traversed these regions with their little fleets of rafts and canoes, it would have been imprudent to have passed the night near the mouth of a river running from the west. The little settlements of the Europeans having now caused the independent Indians to retire from the banks of the Upper Orinoco, the solitude of these regions is such, that from Carichana to Javita, and from Esmeralda to San Fernando de Atabapo, during a course of one hundred and eighty leagues, we did not meet a single boat.

At the mouth of the Rio Zama we approach a class of rivers, that merits great attention. The Zama, the Mataveni, the Atabapo, the Tuamini, the Temi, and the Guainia, are *aguas negras*, that is, their waters, seen in a large body,

\* The dawn : in French *aube* (*alba, albente celo.*)