

CHAPTER XXII.

San Fernando de Atabapo.—San Balthasar.—The rivers Temi and Tuamini.—Javita.—Portage from the Tuamini to the Rio Negro.

DURING the night, we had left, almost unperceived, the waters of the Orinoco; and at sunrise found ourselves as if transported to a new country, on the banks of a river the name of which we had scarcely ever heard pronounced, and which was to conduct us, by the portage of Pimichin, to the Rio Negro, on the frontiers of Brazil. "You will go up," said the president of the missions, who resides at San Fernando, "first the Atabapo, then the Temi, and finally, the Tuamini. When the force of the current of 'black waters' hinders you from advancing, you will be conducted out of the bed of the river through forests, which you will find inundated. Two monks only are settled in those desert places, between the Orinoco and the Rio Negro; but at Javita you will be furnished with the means of having your canoe drawn over land in the course of four days to Caño Pimichin. If it be not broken to pieces you will descend the Rio Negro without any obstacle (from north-west to south-east) as far as the little fort of San Carlos; you will go up the Cassiquiare (from south to north), and then return to San Fernando in a month, descending the Upper Orinoco from east to west." Such was the plan traced for our passage, and we carried it into effect without danger, though not without some suffering, in the space of thirty-three days. The Orinoco runs from its source, or at least from Esmeralda, as far as San Fernando de Atabapo, from east to west; from San Fernando, (where the junction of the Guaviare and the Atabapo takes place,) as far as the mouth of the Rio Apure, it flows from south to north, forming the Great Cataracts; and from the mouth of the Apure as far as Angostura and the coast of the Atlantic its direction is from west to east. In the first part of its course, where the river flows from east to west, it forms that celebrated bifurcation so often disputed by geographers, of which I was the first enabled to determine the situation by