

the expedition for settling the boundaries. The Indians are a little more civilized here than in the rest of the missions; and we found to our surprise a blacksmith of the native race.

In the mission of San Fernando, a tree which gives a peculiar physiognomy to the landscape, is the *piritu* or *pirijao* palm. Its trunk, armed with thorns, is more than sixty feet high; its leaves are pinnated, very thin, undulated, and frizzled towards the points. The fruits of this tree are very extraordinary; every cluster contains from fifty to eighty; they are yellow like apples, grow purple in proportion as they ripen, two or three inches thick, and generally, from abortion, without a kernel. Among the eighty or ninety species of palm-trees peculiar to the New Continent, which I have enumerated in the 'Nova Genera Plantarum Æquinoctialium,' there are none in which the sarcocarp is developed in a manner so extraordinary. The fruit of the *pirijao* furnishes a farinaceous substance, as yellow as the yolk of an egg, slightly saccharine, and extremely nutritious. It is eaten like plantains or potatoes, boiled or roasted in the ashes, and affords a wholesome and agreeable aliment. The Indians and the missionaries are unwearied in their praises of this noble palm-tree, which might be called the *peach-palm*. We found it cultivated in abundance at San Fernando, San Balthasar, Santa Barbara, and wherever we advanced towards the south or the east along the banks of the Atabapo and the Upper Orinoco. In those wild regions we are involuntarily reminded of the assertion of Linnæus, that the country of palm-trees was the first abode of our species, and that man is essentially palmivorous.* On examining the provision accumulated in the huts of the Indians, we perceive that their subsistence during several months of the year depends as much on the farinaceous fruit of the *pirijao*, as on the cassava and plantain. The tree bears fruit but once a year, but to the amount of three clusters, consequently from one hundred and fifty to two hundred fruits.

* *Homo habitat intra tropicos, vescitur palmis, lotophagus; hospitatur extra tropicos sub novercante Cerere, carnivorus.*—"Man dwells naturally within the tropics, and lives on the fruits of the palm-tree; he exists in other parts of the world, and there makes shift to feed on corn and flesh." (*Syst. Nat.*, vol. i, p. 24.)