

life in the missions of the Upper Orinoco, slept with us on the bank of the river. He was an intelligent man, who, during a calm and serene night, pressed me with questions on the magnitude of the stars, on the inhabitants of the moon, on a thousand subjects of which I was as ignorant as himself. Being unable by my answers to satisfy his curiosity, he said to me in a firm tone of the most positive conviction: "with respect to men, I believe there are no more up there than you would have found if you had gone by land from Javita to Cassiquiare. I think I see in the stars, as here, a plain covered with grass, and a forest (*mucho monte*) traversed by a river." In citing these words I paint the impression produced by the monotonous aspect of those solitary regions. May this monotony not be found to extend to the journal of our navigation, and weary the reader accustomed to the description of the scenes and historical memorials of the old continent!

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Rio Negro.—Boundaries of Brazil.—The Cassiquiare.—Bifurcation of the Orinoco.

THE Rio Negro, compared to the Amazon, the Rio de la Plata, or the Orinoco, is but a river of the second order. Its possession has been for ages of great political importance to the Spanish Government, because it is capable of furnishing a rival power, Portugal, with an easy passage into the missions of Guiana, and thereby disturbing the Capitania general of Caracas in its southern limits. Three hundred years have been spent in vain territorial disputes. According to the difference of times, and the degree of civilization among the natives, resource has been had sometimes to the authority of the Pope, and sometimes the support of astronomy; and the disputants being generally more interested in prolonging than in terminating the struggle, the nautical sciences and the geography of the New Continent, have alone gained by this interminable litigation. When the affairs of Paraguay, and the possession of the colony of Del Sacramento, became of great importance to the courts