

voyage of Orellana, Christopher Columbus imagined he had found the Amazons in the Caribbee Islands. This great man was told, that the small island of Madanino (Montserrat) was inhabited by warlike women, who lived the greater part of the year separate from men. At other times also, the conquistadores imagined that the women, who defended their huts in the absence of their husbands, were republics of Amazons; and, by an error less excusable, formed a like supposition respecting the religious congregations, the convents of Mexican virgins, who, far from admitting men at any season of the year into their society, lived according to the austere rule of Quetzalcohuatl. Such was the disposition of men's minds, that in the long succession of travellers, who crowded on each other in their discoveries and in narrations of the marvels of the New World, every one readily declared he had seen what his predecessors had announced.

We passed three nights at San Carlos del Rio Negro. I count the nights, because I watched during the greater part of them, in the hope of seizing the moment of the passage of some star over the meridian. That I might have nothing to reproach myself with, I kept the instruments always ready for an observation. I could not even obtain double altitudes, to calculate the latitude by the method of Douwes. What a contrast between two parts of the same zone; between the sky of Cumana, where the air is constantly pure as in Persia and Arabia, and the sky of the Rio Negro, veiled like that of the Feroe islands, without sun, or moon, or stars!

On the 10th of May, our canoe being ready before sunrise, we embarked to go up the Rio Negro as far as the mouth of the Cassiquiare, and to devote ourselves to researches on the real course of that river, which unites the Orinoco to the Amazon. The morning was fine; but, in proportion as the heat augmented, the sky became obscured. The air is so saturated by water in these forests, that the vesicular vapours become visible on the least increase of evaporation at the surface of the earth. The breeze being never felt, the humid strata are not displaced and renewed by dryer air. We were every day more grieved at the aspect of the cloudy sky. M. Bonpland was losing by this excessive humidity the plants he had collected; and I, for