

explaining this coexistence of rivers differently coloured, within a small extent of territory, but shall merely observe, that at the mouth of the Pacimoni, and on the borders of the lake Vasiva, we were again struck with the purity and extreme transparency of the brown waters. Ancient Arabian travellers have observed, that the Alpine branch of the Nile, which joins the Bahr el Abiad near Halfaja, has green waters, which are so transparent, that the fish may be seen at the bottom of the river.

We passed some turbulent rapids before we reached the mission of Mandavaca. The village, which bears also the name of Quirabuena, contains only sixty natives. The state of the Christian settlements is in general so miserable, that, in the whole course of the Cassiquiare, on a length of fifty leagues, not two hundred inhabitants are found. The banks of this river were indeed more peopled before the arrival of the missionaries; the Indians have withdrawn into the woods, toward the east; for the western plains are almost deserted. The natives subsist during a part of the year on those large ants of which I have spoken above. These insects are much esteemed here, as spiders are in the southern hemisphere, where the savages of Australia deem them delicious. We found at Mandavaca the good old missionary, who had already spent "twenty years of mosquitos in the *bosques del Cassiquiare*," and whose legs were so spotted by the stings of insects, that the colour of the skin could scarcely be perceived. He talked to us of his solitude, and of the sad necessity which often compelled him to leave the most atrocious crimes unpunished in the two missions of Mandavaca and Vasiva. In the latter place, an Indian alcalde had, a few years before, eaten one of his wives, after having taken her to his *conuco*,* and fattened her by good feeding. The cannibalism of the nations of Guiana is never caused by the want of subsistence, or by the superstitions of their religion, as in the islands of the South Sea; but is generally the effect of the vengeance of a conqueror, and (as the missionaries say) "of a vitiated appetite." Victory over a hostile tribe is celebrated by a repast, in which some parts of the body of a prisoner are devoured. Sometimes a

* A hut surrounded with cultivated ground; a sort of country-house, which the natives prefer to residing in the missions.