

menaced. The view of the river, and the hum of the insects, were a little monotonous; but some remains of our natural cheerfulness enabled us to find sources of relief during our wearisome passage. We discovered, that by eating small portions of dry cacao ground without sugar, and drinking a large quantity of the river water, we succeeded in appeasing our appetite for several hours. The ants and the mosquitos troubled us more than the humidity and the want of food. Notwithstanding the privations to which we were exposed during our excursions in the Cordilleras, the navigation from Mandavaca to Esmeralda has always appeared to us the most painful part of our travels in America. I advise those who are not very desirous of seeing the great bifurcation of the Orinoco, to take the way of the Atabapo in preference to that of the Cassiquiare.

Above the Caño Duractumuni, the Cassiquiare pursues a uniform direction from north-east to south-west. We were surprised to see how much the high steep banks of the Cassiquiare had been undermined on each side by the sudden risings of the water. Uprooted trees formed as it were natural rafts; and being half-buried in the mud, they were extremely dangerous for canoes. We passed the night of the 20th of May, the last of our passage on the Cassiquiare, near the point of the bifurcation of the Orinoco. We had some hope of being able to make an astronomical observation, as falling-stars of remarkable magnitude were visible through the vapours that veiled the sky; whence we concluded that the stratum of vapours must be very thin, since meteors of this kind have scarcely ever been seen below a cloud. Those we now beheld shot towards the north, and succeeded each other at almost equal intervals. The Indians, who seldom ennoble by their expressions the wanderings of the imagination, name the falling-stars the *urine*; and the dew the *spittle of the stars*. The clouds thickened anew, and we discerned neither the meteors, nor the real stars, for which we had impatiently waited during several days.

We had been told, that we should find the insects at Esmeralda "still more cruel and voracious," than in the branch of the Orinoco which we were going up; nevertheless