

paration was enveloped in great mystery; that its principal ingredient was furnished by a subterranean plant with a tuberous root, which never puts forth leaves, and which is called specially 'the root' (*raiz de si misma*); that the venomous exhalations which arise from the manufacture are fatal to the lives of the old women who (being otherwise useless) are chosen to watch over this operation; finally, that these vegetable juices are never thought to be sufficiently concentrated till a few drops produce *at a distance* a repulsive action on the blood. An Indian wounds himself slightly; and a dart dipped in the liquid *curare* is held near the wound. If it make the blood return to the vessels without having been brought into contact with them, the poison is judged to be sufficiently concentrated."

When we arrived at Esmeralda, the greater part of the Indians were returning from an excursion which they had made to the east, beyond the Rio Padamo, to gather *juvias*, or the fruit of the *bertholletia*, and the liana which yields the *curare*. Their return was celebrated by a festival, which is called in the mission *la fiesta de las juvias*, and which resembles our harvest-homes and vintage-feasts. The women had prepared a quantity of fermented liquor; and during two days the Indians were in a state of intoxication. Among nations who attach great importance to the fruit of the palm, and of some other trees useful for the nourishment of man, the period when these fruits are gathered is marked by public rejoicings, and time is divided according to these festivals, which succeed one another in a course invariably regular. We were fortunate enough to find an old Indian more temperate than the rest, who was employed in preparing the *curare* poison from freshly-gathered plants. He was the chemist of the place. We found at his dwelling large earthen pots for boiling the vegetable juice, shallower vessels to favour the evaporation by a larger surface, and leaves of the plantain-tree rolled up in the shape of our filters, and used to filtrate the liquids, more or less loaded with fibrous matter. The greatest order and neatness prevailed in this hut, which was transformed into a chemical laboratory. The old Indian was known throughout the mission by the name of the poison-master (*amo del curare*). He had that self-sufficient air