

When travellers judge only by their own sensations they differ from each other respecting the abundance of the mosquitos as they do respecting the progressive increase or diminution of the temperature. The state of our organs, the motion of the air, its degree of humidity or dryness, its electric intensity, a thousand circumstances contribute at once to make us suffer more or less from the heat and the insects. My fellow travellers were unanimously of opinion that Esmeralda was more tormented by mosquitos than the banks of the Cassiquiare, and even more than the two missions of the Great Cataracts; whilst I, less sensible than they of the high temperature of the air, thought that the irritation produced by the insects was somewhat less at Esmeralda than at the entrance of the Upper Orinoco. On hearing the complaints that are made of these tormenting insects in hot countries it is difficult to believe that their absence, or rather their sudden disappearance, could become a subject of inquietude; yet such is the fact. The inhabitants of Esmeralda related to us, that in the year 1795, an hour before sunset, when the mosquitos usually form a very thick cloud, the air was observed to be suddenly free from them. During the space of twenty minutes, not one insect was perceived, although the sky was cloudless, and no wind announced rain. It is necessary to have lived in those countries to comprehend the degree of surprise which the sudden disappearance of the insects must have produced. The inhabitants congratulated each other, and inquired whether this state of happiness, this relief from pain (*felicidad y alivio*), could be of any duration. But soon, instead of enjoying the present, they yielded to chimerical fears, and imagined that the order of nature was perverted. Some old Indians, the sages of the place, asserted that the disappearance of the insects must be the precursor of a great earthquake. Warm discussions arose; the least noise amid the foliage of the trees was listened to with an attentive ear; and when the air was again filled with mosquitos they were almost hailed with pleasure. We could not guess what modification of the atmosphere had caused this phenomenon, which must not be confounded with the periodical replacing of one species of insects by another.