

I believe, to fix our attention less on the transition from one colour to another in individuals, than on their habit of separating themselves, and forming distinct bands.

We left our resting place before sunrise on the 24th of May. In a rocky cove, which had been the dwelling of some Durimundi Indians, the aromatic odour of the plants was so powerful, that although sleeping in the open air, and the irritability of our nervous system being allayed by the habits of a life of fatigue, we were nevertheless incommoded by it. We could not ascertain the flowers which diffused this perfume. The forest was impenetrable; but M. Bonpland believed that large clumps of *pancratium* and other liliaceous plants were concealed in the neighbouring marshes. Descending the Orinoco by favour of the current, we passed first the mouth of the Rio Cunucunumo, and then the Guanami and the Puriname. The two banks of the principal river are entirely desert; lofty mountains rise on the north, and on the south a vast plain extends far as the eye can reach beyond the sources of the Atacavi, which lower down takes the name of the Atabapo. There is something gloomy and desolate in this aspect of a river, on which not even a fisherman's canoe is seen. Some independant tribes, the Abirianos and the Maquiritares, dwell in the mountainous country; but in the neighbouring savannahs,\* bounded by the Cassiquiare, the Atabapo, the Orinoco, and the Rio Negro, there is now scarcely any trace of a human habitation. I say now; for here, as in other parts of Guiana, rude figures representing the sun, the moon, and different animals, traced on the hardest rocks of granite, attest the anterior existence of a people, very different from those who became known to us on the banks of the Orinoco. According to the accounts of the natives, and of the most intelligent missionaries, these symbolic signs resemble perfectly the characters we saw a hundred leagues more to the north, near Caycara, opposite the mouth of the Rio Apure.†

In advancing from the plains of the Cassiquiare and the

\* They form a quadrilateral plot of a thousand square leagues, the opposite sides of which have contrary slopes, the Cassiquiare flowing towards the south, the Atabapo towards the north, the Orinoco towards the north-west, and the Rio Negro towards the south-east.

† See p. 183.