

the walls of the Mexican palace of Mitla, and the vases of ancient Greece.

We could not acquire any precise idea of the period to which the origin of the *mapires* and the painted vases, contained in the bone-cavern of Atarupe, can be traced. The greater part seemed not to be more than a century old; but it may be supposed that, sheltered from all humidity under the influence of a uniform temperature, the preservation of these articles would be no less perfect if their origin dated from a period far more remote. A tradition circulates among the Guahibos, that the warlike Atures, pursued by the Caribs, escaped to the rocks that rise in the middle of the Great Cataracts; and there that nation, heretofore so numerous, became gradually extinct, as well as its language. The last families of the Atures still existed in 1767, in the time of the missionary Gili. At the period of our voyage an old parrot was shown at Maypures, of which the inhabitants said, and the fact is worthy of observation, that "they did not understand what it said, because it spoke the language of the Atures."

We opened, to the great concern of our guides, several *mapires*, for the purpose of examining attentively the form of the skulls. They were all marked by the characteristics of the American race, with the exception of two or three, which approached indubitably to the Caucasian. In the middle of the Cataracts, in the most inaccessible spots, cases are found strengthened with iron bands, and filled with European tools, vestiges of clothes, and glass trinkets. These articles, which have given rise to the most absurd reports of treasures hidden by the Jesuits, probably belonged to Portuguese traders who had penetrated into these savage countries. May we suppose that the skulls of European race, which we saw mingled with the skeletons of the natives, and preserved with the same care, were the remains of some Portuguese travellers who had died of sickness, or had been killed in battle? The aversion evinced by the natives for whatever is not of their own race renders this hypothesis little probable. Perhaps fugitive mestizos of the missions of the Meta and Apure may have come and settled near the Cataracts, marrying