

throws light upon their origin. In the hot part of Guiana we can go back only to the period when the Castilian and Portuguese *conquerors*, and more recently peaceful monks, penetrated amid so many barbarous nations.

It appears, that, to the north of the Cataracts, in the strait of Baraguan, there are caverns filled with bones, similar to those I have just described: but I was informed of this fact only after my return; our Indian pilots did not mention it when we landed at the strait. These tombs no doubt have given rise to a fable of the Ottomacs, according to which the granitic and solitary rocks of Baraguan, the forms of which are very singular, are regarded as the 'grand-fathers,' the 'ancient chiefs' of the tribe. The custom of separating the flesh from the bones, very anciently practised by the Massagetes, is still known among several hordes of the Orinoco. It is even asserted, and with some probability, that the Guaraons plunge their dead bodies under water enveloped in nets; and, that the small caribe-fishes, of which we saw everywhere an innumerable quantity, devour in a few days the muscular flesh, and thus prepare the skeleton. It may be supposed, that this operation can be practised only in places where crocodiles are not common. Some tribes, for instance the Tamanacs, are accustomed to lay waste the fields of a deceased relative, and cut down the trees which he has planted. They say, "that the sight of objects, which belonged to their relation, makes them melancholy." They like better to efface than to preserve remembrances. These effects of Indian sensibility are very detrimental to agriculture, and the monks oppose with energy these superstitious practices, to which the natives converted to Christianity still adhere in the missions.

The tombs of the Indians of the Orinoco have not been very closely examined, because they do not contain valuable articles like those of Peru; and even on the spot no faith is now lent to the chimerical ideas, which were heretofore formed of the wealth of the ancient inhabitants of El Dorado. The thirst of gold everywhere precedes the desire of instruction, and a taste for researches into antiquity; in all the mountainous part of South America, from Merida and Santa Marta to the table-lands of Quito and Upper Peru, the labours of absolute mining have been undertaken to discover