

when the rain ceases to fall. At the village of Banco, on the bank of the river Magdalena, I saw the Indian women who make pottery continually swallowing great pieces of clay. These women were not in a state of pregnancy; and they affirmed, that earth is an aliment which they do not find hurtful. In other American tribes, people soon fall sick, and waste away, when they yield too much to this mania of eating earth. We found at the mission of San Borja an Indian child of the Guahiba nation, who was as thin as a skeleton. The mother informed us that the little girl was reduced to this lamentable state of atrophy in consequence of a disordered appetite, she having refused during four months to take almost any other food than clay. Yet San Borja is only twenty-five leagues distant from the mission of Uruana, inhabited by that tribe of the Ottomacs, who, from the effect no doubt of a habit progressively acquired, swallow the *poja* without experiencing any pernicious effects. Father Gumilla asserts, that the Ottomacs take as an aperient, oil, or rather the melted fat of the crocodile, when they feel any gastric obstructions; but the missionary whom we found among them was little disposed to confirm this assertion. It may be asked, why the mania of eating earth is much more rare in the frigid and temperate than in the torrid zones; and why in Europe it is found only among women in a state of pregnancy, and sickly children. This difference between hot and temperate climates arises perhaps only from the inert state of the functions of the stomach, caused by strong cutaneous perspiration. It has been supposed to be observed, that the inordinate taste for eating earth augments among the African slaves, and becomes more pernicious, when they are restricted to a regimen purely vegetable and deprived of spirituous liquors.

The negroes on the coast of Guinea delight in eating a yellowish earth, which they call *caouac*. The slaves who are taken to America endeavour to indulge in this habit; but it proves detrimental to their health. They say, that the earth of the West Indies is not so easy of digestion as that of their country." Thibaut de Chanvalon, in his Voyage to Martinico, expresses himself very judiciously on this pathological phenomenon. "Another cause," he says, "of this pain in the stomach is, that several of the negroes, who come