

pled plains, filled with herds, furnish them with booty. They commit their depredations on horseback, in the manner of the Bedouins. The insalubrity of the prisons would be attended with fatal results, but that these receptacles are cleared from time to time by the flight of the prisoners. It also frequently happens that sentences of death, tardily pronounced by the Audiencia of Caracas, cannot be executed for want of a hangman. In these cases the barbarous custom is observed of pardoning one criminal on condition of his hanging the others. Our guides related to us, that, a short time before our arrival on the coast of Cumana, a Zambo, known for the great ferocity of his manners, determined to screen himself from punishment by turning executioner. The preparations for the execution however, shook his resolution; he felt a horror of himself, and preferring death to the disgrace of thus saving his life, he called again for his irons, which had been struck off. He did not long remain in prison, and he underwent his sentence through the baseness of one of his accomplices. This awakening of a sentiment of honour in the soul of a murderer is a psychologic phenomenon worthy of reflection. The man who had so often shed the blood of travellers in the plains, recoiled at the idea of becoming the passive instrument of justice, in inflicting upon others a punishment which he felt that he himself deserved.

If, even in the peaceful times when M. Bonpland and myself had the good fortune to travel through North and South America, the Llanos were the refuge of malefactors, who had committed crimes in the missions of the Orinoco, or who had escaped from the prisons on the coast, how much worse must that state of things have been rendered by discord, during the continuance of that sanguinary struggle which has terminated in conferring freedom and independence on those vast regions! Our European wastes and heaths are but a feeble image of the savannahs of the New Continent, which, for the space of eight or ten thousand square leagues are smooth as the surface of the sea. The immensity of their extent insures impunity to robbers, who conceal themselves more effectually in the savannahs than in our mountains and forests; and it is easy to conceive, that even a European police would not be very ef-