

Jose Avalo, the intendant of Caracas, undertook a very considerable work in the centre of the missions of the Rio Carony, near the town of Upata, in the Cerros del Potrero and de Chirica. They declared that the whole rock was auriferous; stamping-mills, *brocards*, and smelting-furnaces were constructed. After having expended very large sums, it was discovered that the pyrites contained no trace whatever of gold. These essays, though fruitless, served to renew the ancient idea, "that every shining rock in Guiana is teeming with gold (*una madre del oro*)."

Not contented with taking the mica-slate to the furnace, strata of amphibolic slates were shown to me near Angostura, without any mixture of heterogeneous substances, which had been worked under the whimsical name of black ore of gold (*oro negro*).

This is the place to make known, in order to complete the description of the Orinoco, the principal results of my researches on El Dorado, the White Sea, or Laguna Parime, and the sources of the Orinoco, as they are marked in the most recent maps. The idea of an auriferous earth, eminently rich, has been connected, ever since the end of the sixteenth century, with that of a great inland lake, which furnishes at the same time waters to the Orinoco, the Rio Branco, and the Rio Essequibo. I believe, from a more accurate knowledge of the country, a long and laborious study of the Spanish authors who treat of El Dorado, and, above all, from comparing a great number of ancient maps, arranged in chronological order, I have succeeded in discovering the source of these errors. All fables have some real foundation; that of El Dorado resembles those myths of antiquity, which, travelling from country to country, have been successively adapted to different localities. In the sciences, in order to distinguish truth from error, it often suffices to retrace the history of opinions, and to follow their successive developments. The discussion to which I shall devote the end of this chapter is important, not only because it throws light on the events of the Conquest, and that long series of disastrous expeditions made in search of El Dorado, the last of which was in the year 1775; it also furnishes, in addition to this simply historical interest, another, more substantial and more generally felt, that of rectifying the geography of South America, and of disembarassing the