

clefts and humid sides of the rock. This spot displayed one of the most extraordinary scenes of nature, that we had contemplated on the banks of the Orinoco. The river rolled its waters turbulently over our heads. It seemed like the sea dashing against reefs of rocks; but at the entrance of the cavern we could remain dry beneath a large sheet of water that precipitated itself in an arch from above the barrier. In other cavities, deeper, but less spacious, the rock was pierced by the effect of successive filtrations. We saw columns of water, eight or nine inches broad, descending from the top of the vault, and finding an issue by clefts, that seemed to communicate at great distances with each other.

The cascades of Europe, forming only one fall, or several falls close to each other, can never produce such variety in the shifting landscape. This variety is peculiar to rapids, to a succession of small cataracts several miles in length, to rivers that force their way across rocky dikes and accumulated blocks of granite. We had the opportunity of viewing this extraordinary sight longer than we wished. Our boat was to coast the eastern bank of a narrow island, and to take us in again after a long circuit. We passed an hour and a half in vain expectation of it. Night approached, and with it a tremendous storm. It rained with violence. We began to fear that our frail bark had been wrecked against the rocks, and that the Indians, conformably to their habitual indifference for the evils of others, had returned tranquilly to the mission. There were only three of us: we were completely wet, and uneasy respecting the fate of our boat: it appeared far from agreeable to pass, without sleep, a long night of the torrid zone, amid the noise of the Raudales. M. Bonpland proposed to leave me in the island with Don Nicolas Soto, and to swim across the branches of the river, that are separated by the granitic dikes. He hoped to reach the forest, and seek assistance at Atures from Father Zea. We dissuaded him with difficulty from undertaking this hazardous enterprise. He knew little of the labyrinth of small channels, into which the Orinoco is divided. Most of them have strong whirlpools, and what passed before our eyes, while we were deliberating on our situation, proved sufficiently, that the natives had deceived us respecting the absence of crocodiles in the