

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Llanos del Pao, or eastern part of the Plains of Venezuela.—Missions of the Caribs.—Last visit to the Coast of Nueva Barcelona, Cumana, and Araya.

NIGHT had set in when we crossed for the last time the bed of the Orinoco. We purposed to rest near the little fort San Rafael, and on the following morning at daybreak to set out on our journey through the plains of Venezuela. Nearly six weeks had elapsed since our arrival at Angostura; and we earnestly wished to reach the coast, with the view of finding, at Cumana, or at Nueva Barcelona, a vessel in which we might embark for the island of Cuba, thence to proceed to Mexico. After the sufferings to which we had been exposed during several months, whilst sailing in small boats on rivers infested by mosquitos, the idea of a sea-voyage was not without its charms. We had no idea of ever again returning to South America. Sacrificing the Andes of Peru to the Archipelago of the Philippines, (of which so little is known,) we adhered to our old plan of remaining a year in New Spain, then proceeding in a galleon from Acapulco to Manilla, and returning to Europe by way of Bassora and Aleppo. We imagined that, when we had once left the Spanish possessions in America, the fall of that ministry which had procured for us so many advantages, could not be prejudicial to the execution of our enterprise.

Our mules were in waiting for us on the left bank of the Orinoco. The collection of plants, and the different geological series, which we had brought from the Esmeralda and Rio Negro, had greatly augmented our baggage; and, as it would have been dangerous to lose sight of our herbals, we expected to make a very slow journey across the Llanos. The heat was excessive, owing to the reverberation of the soil, which was almost everywhere destitute of vegetation; yet the centigrade thermometer during the day (in the shade) was only from thirty to thirty-four degrees, and during the night, from twenty-seven to twenty-eight degrees. Here, therefore, as almost everywhere within the tropics, it was less the absolute degree of heat, than its duration, that