

CHAPTER XXI.

Agriculture—Industry—Reflexions on the Bauian tree—Mines—Coins—
Salt-works—Commerce—Exportations—Importations.

AGRICULTURE, which is followed with considerable activity, is so discouraged by the want of markets that the greatest part of the land remains uncultivated.

The plough is introduced with effect in the plains of the cold lands; in the warm vallies only the hoe is employed.

Though estimated much higher, it is not thought that the produce of the lands yields above three per cent. A small number of lands only form an exception, and this from a peculiar circumstance: namely, that containing immense pastures, they rear much cattle, the sale of which brings in a considerable revenue.

The fertility of the soil varies according to the elevation of the country. There are no general data on the value of the lands. Those which are already cultivated are, of course, more valuable, or worth more than those which are uncultivated; they are likewise the best. Ne-

vertheless, it is thought that a piece of land fit for the growth of wheat, and the breeding of large cattle, which is thirty cords in length, and fifteen in breadth, would be worth in the cold region 1000 piastres, and in the warm one 200 piastres. A cord is equal to 78 varas, and a vara to 37 Castilian inches.

A corn estate, which, at the same time serves for the pasture of sheep, is valued in the cold parts at 500 piastres, in the hot regions at 100 piastres, when it is 12 cords long and 6 broad.

Formerly, a considerable estate has been sold for a mule completely harnessed. Bargains nearly similar are still made; in a few years all will be changed.

The richest farms are those in the neighbourhood of the towns, particularly Bogota. The buildings are well constructed, and the barns appear to be tolerably well stocked: they might be much more so if less land were employed as pasturage. On the other hand, if the extent of the pastures were diminished, what would become of the troops of mules and horses, without which there could be no communication? The ground is so rough and difficult that great number of beasts of burden are necessary for the conveyance of a few goods. From Bogota to Sogamoso, this inconvenience might be remedied by opening roads fit for wheeled carriages.

Though cattle are very profitable, especially

when they are procured from the plains, the inhabitants have not imitated the prudent conduct of the jesuits, who, to prevent the animals from suffering by the too sudden transition from the banks of the Meta to those of Bogota, had built, at intervals, farms, where they rested several days; thus accustoming them by degrees to a climate so different from their own, and avoiding the enormous losses which occur every year, and which are caused in a great measure, either by the cold, or by the shock of the stones of the high lands, which soon break the tender horns of the oxen of the plains. Horses are, of all the animals which traverse the paramos, the least liable to accidents.

The cultivation of colonial articles is less perfect than that which we have called European cultivation; though richer in its produce, it is much less profitable from the indolence of the planter. It is lamentable to see the negligence with which cotton, sugar, and cocoa are cultivated; the indifference with which coffee, indigo, and the nopal loaded with the cochineal insect, are suffered to grow without any care being bestowed on them. Happy in the abundance which he enjoys without labour, the planter contents himself with hoeing round the foot of the banians, or cutting the sugar cane, with the juice of which he intoxicates himself.

The present government of Colombia having

felt the necessity of favouring agriculture by every possible means, had fixed, by a decree of the 11th of October, 1821, a very moderate price on the sale of waste lands. It sold them at the rate of 2 piastres the fanega near the coast, and one piastre in the interior.

The fanega of ground has been fixed at 100 square varas, or 20 estadales; consequently, at 400 square estadales. Every estadale contains 4 square varas.

This liberality of the Colombian government has lately received fresh extension. The last congress has placed at the disposal of the government 2,000,000 of fanegas of land, to be distributed gratuitously among foreign families who wish to establish themselves in the country, on condition that they shall clear them the same year in which they obtained the grant.

Industry, whose productions here resemble those of Africa, being still fettered in the trammels of custom will never depart from the present course so long as foreign competition shall check the progress it might make. Besides, are manufactures so necessary in a country already sufficiently rich by its agricultural produce and its mines? If it added to the riches of its soil, perfection in manufactures, its connexion with Europe would cease. Would it then be necessary for the interest of the old world to establish it by force of arms?

What will always oppose the prosperity of agriculture among the South Americans, when they have become independent, is the cultivation of the banian ; useful in temperate climates, because it may contribute to the development of industry, by devoting to manufactures those arms which, in ruder countries, must be left for agriculture, it is fatal in sultry climates where an excessive heat invites repose, by favouring the apathy natural to the inhabitants of the tropics.

In the plains of America, the banian must produce the same effects as the date has caused in Africa ; it will make Bedouins in the west, as the latter has perpetuated those of the east. Can we help believing this, when we see the abundance of the fruits of this plant, the rapidity of its growth, and the facility of its cultivation ?

Wherever man is not obliged to cultivate the earth for his support, he becomes a nomade ; on the other hand, wherever he has imposed upon himself the necessity of living upon sorgho, maize, rice, and other grain, whatever be the abundance of the harvest, he becomes attached to his field, he has a permanent abode.

In those regions, on the other hand, where the milk of the cocoa, the cabbage of a palm, the fruit of a date, the gum of a mimosa, or the fruit of a fig, are sufficient to supply his table, he leads a wandering life, and has no attachment to any particular place. Why should he fix himself

to any spot, when nature has every where provided for his subsistence? He, therefore roams incessantly; from time to time he sits down, rests himself, takes some fruit from his leather bag, eats, goes to sleep, strikes his tent, and transports himself elsewhere.

If the produce of the agriculture and manufactures of the Colombians are uninteresting to Europe, and give it no reason to fear a competition to its disadvantage, those of the mines may become important when they shall be worked by more skilful hands. It will then be very difficult for Europeans to sell to the Colombians copper, iron, and lead, when the latter shall extract these in sufficient quantity from the mountains of Opon, Truxillo, Moniquira, and Guanacas;* when the manner of working the gold and silver mines of Mariquita is improved, their produce will be tripled; a result of which the country has the more need, because, dealing with only one people, the English, who will hardly receive any goods, they have no means of paying them but with the precious metals, before extracted from the earth by the Spaniards. They are transferred, therefore, to Jamaica, and with such rapidity, that in a short time in the land of gold not a grain will be found.

The mines of Choco and Popayan are still

* See note XVII.

worked, but in an imperfect manner; the negroes, every moment ready to become soldiers, leave the finest establishments to fall off. A mine which employs 60 slaves, and produces 20 pounds of gold annually, is considered a good estate.

Before the revolution of South America, the mints of New Grenada produced :

Santa-Fè.		Popayan.
	Piastres.	
1801	1,506,356	962,748
1802	1,240,476	962,748
1803	1,192,791	965,686
1804	1,274,576	663,696
	5,214,199*	3,554,878

The quantity of gold which the English draw from the country, and which is still considerable, notwithstanding the diminution of the produce of the mines, should not excite surprise, when we recollect that a great part of it is derived from the melting of trinkets and of plate, which every one disposes of.†

* Vide note XVIII.

† There is a great deal of base money in the country; a large proportion of the small coin called *pesetas* are counterfeit; it is to be observed that they come from Jamaica and Curaçao.

Several provinces produce gold. Hitherto this metal has been discovered in the greatest quantity in the western Cordillera, and chiefly near the coasts of the Pacific; Santa-Fè, however, receives a considerable quantity from Pampluna and Giron; the last is the most esteemed, and as much as twenty reals the castillan are paid for it. The province of Antioquia is full of it; its mines were formerly very productive; the gold was in demand, and though of a low degree of fineness, (18 carats) produced sixteen reals the castillan.

In the province of Antioquia a great quantity of a very low standard is collected, it is called *oro bajo*, and fetches only from three to six reals per castillan.

It has been observed that gold is usually found at a moderate elevation; Pampluna, however, borders on the region of the paramos; and Santa-Rosa, in the province of Antioquia, is 1324 toises above the level of the sea. In general the mines of Choco and Barbacons are esteemed the richest; those of the Cauca, though abundant, are much less so; it seems that in Choco the great quantity of gold injures its quality. This metal, almost always united with platina, seldom fetches more than twelve reals the castillan.

Mines of silver are not less common in all these countries. Those of Mariquita are the most celebrated; many other places contain them,

such as Pampluna, Leyva, and the country in which the town of la Plata (silver) is situated, which is said to have received its name from the mines discovered there. We have explained the motives which induced Spain to close these mines; they have ceased with the present government, and accordingly several Englishmen have already thought of working those of Mariquita; for foreigners have the same liberty as the natives of possessing and working the mines.

Mines of iron, copper, and lead, are very common, only the two latter are worked with any degree of care, the former are absolutely neglected.

Emerald mines have been opened at Muzos, and a considerable quantity with which the Madonas in the churches are still loaded, had been extracted from them, when Spain prohibited working of them to be continued, without any other assignable motive than jealousy.

Other precious stones are likewise found, such as cornelians, agates, &c.

Pampluna is famous for its quarries of Mica, and Zipaquirá for its salt mine*.

This mine, like most of those of the same kind, is situated at the foot of a paramo. It has a striking appearance. The salt, like an immense rock of crystal, shines with dazzling splendor

* See Note XIX.

when the rays of the sun come in contact with its prisms. It is very difficult to extract it ; it being only by means of iron crows that some pieces can be loosened. These are immediately thrown into a pool of water which the rain forms at the foot of the mine. The water is conveyed through clay pipes into the manufactories, where it is boiled for a day and a night to evaporate the sulphureous particles. For this operation they use earthen vessels of the same shape, though of different sizes. The largest cost a real; they can be used but once. The miners are generally Indians, assisted by negroes. This is almost an hereditary occupation among them, since they were the first who opened this valuable mine; they employ, in the present day, the same process as they formerly used, the rudest that can well be imagined.

The mine of Zipaquira is not the only one. There are also those of Tauza and Enemocon, situated in a similar soil, and all three inexhaustible; the salt of Enemocon is the most esteemed.

The salt of Zipaquira is usually sold at from six to seven reals the arroba (25 pounds); the quantity sold is very inconsiderable.

The produce of the mine of Zipaquira, which is badly worked, and the expences of which are enormous, on account of the purchase of the earthen vessels and the wood, which is procured from a

great distance, the surrounding country being entirely destitute of it, amounts to nearly 150,000 piastres per annum. The expences of management are not included in this calculation. There are so many salt mines in the country, that when they are opened, this revenue will be less profitable.

An Englishman of the name of Thompson, under pretence of improving the system of working the mines hitherto pursued in that of Zipaquirá, has obtained an exclusive right to it, on engaging to pay the government five thousand piastres a month.

The inland trade is tolerably active ; though the individual transactions are of not much importance, this is made up for by the uninterrupted course of commerce, for instance, there is none more brisk than the salt trade ; in the antient viceroyalty it is a coin as current as money, the value of which being almost invariable, serves as a standard in all bargains. There is no exchange more frequent and lucrative than that of salt for sugar and stuffs.

Few mercantile speculations are attempted unless they hold out a profit of a hundred per cent ; this is the only incitement to surmount the fatigues of the roads.

Next to salt, cocoa is the most important article of merchandise ; the consumption of it is as prodigious as the quantity produced. That of

the Magdalena is in the greatest demand ; that of Neyva and Timana sells at thirty piastres the load of ten arrobas ; at Antioquia it costs forty piastres, and at Carthagena fifty, on account of the expenses of carriage. Cucuta furnishes a considerable quantity, which is sent to Europe by way of Maracaïbo ; that of Guayaquil, which is exported to Peru and Mexico, enriches the merchants of that port.

Flour, the price of which at Bogota is ten piastres the load (20 arrobas), is neither in sufficiently large quantities, nor of a quality good enough to be sent to the ports of the republic, and to compete with the fine flour of North America, which may be had there at 10 piastres the barrel.

Sugar, though very abundant, is almost entirely consumed in the country itself, as the Spaniards are very fond of it. It may be presumed, however, from the low price of the sugar of Socorro, Guaduas, and the Cauca, that, if the cultivation were more judiciously managed, and the roads better, it would be possible by having it from the provinces of the interior, to obtain it cheaper at Panama, Carthagena, and in the other ports, where it is as high as four reals the pound, while in the interior it only costs from five to ten reals the arroba.

Coffee being little cultivated and little esteemed by the inhabitants of the interior of the

the apothecaries' shops ; it is worth as much as two reals a pound, while twenty times as much might be collected in the country as is produced by the whole crops of Jamaica.

Tobacco being in universal use among the Spanish Americans, is in general of a good quality ; for, they have endeavoured to perfect the cultivation of this plant from taste rather than profit. The tobacco of the Cauca is the most esteemed ; that of Giron, Ambalema, and Varinas, which is neither so strong nor so rough, is more agreeable to Europeans.

The Dutch formerly transported 10,000 quintals of tobacco from Varinas, which they sold under the name of Dutch tobacco.

The government has the monopoly of tobacco : it purchases it of the planter at half a real a pound, and sells it again at two reals. The exportation of this article, were it relieved from the monopoly, would yield four times as much to the state by the duties, for the line of its custom-houses, though badly guarded, is still better than that of the *droits réunis*.

The government has ordered, by a law, that the overplus should be sent to the nearest ports to be sold to foreigners ; notwithstanding this prudent regulation, it is rare to meet with any other tobacco than that from the Havannah and the United States.

Cotton which is ill cultivated, is almost

scarcely suffices to load five or six ships which come to Carthagena or Santa-Martha. In Caracas, where the culture of it is more attended to, it is one of the chief articles of exportation. Immense fields will, in future, be covered with this valuable article.

Quinquina of Loxa, which is brought from Guayaquil, forms one of the most productive branches of commerce in this province. As much as ten thousand loads have been exported in one year. This quantity has of course diminished, since that from the upper part of the Magdalena has been found to be equal in quality. The quinquina of Loxa will be much less in request when that of Pitañon becomes an article of foreign commerce.

The dying woods are a principal object of maritime commerce; they are the only productions which the English take in exchange for their manufactures.

The skins of leather, destined to pack up cocoa or to form the beds of the inhabitants, are scarce in the Cordilleras; though formerly common in Caracas, since fifty thousand were annually exported from the port of La Guayra, the number has considerably decreased during the war. Besides this, the expences of carriage prodigiously increase the price in several places; for those purchased at four reals on the Magdalena, cost from twelve to fourteen reals at Carthagena.

The English purchase a great deal of tortoise-shell in the gulph of Darien, in the isles of San-Blas, and on the coasts of Choco; it seldom costs above four piastres the pound, and may be had in considerable quantities.

Pearls, which Europeans suppose constitute the riches of these countries, produce but a very small revenue; it is calculated that Panama does not export more than what amounts to about forty thousand piastres annually; Rio-Hacha, perhaps, does not produce so much.

Mother of pearl, which, for some years past, has been brought into competition with that of the east, and which was sold at 10 piastres the thousand, is no longer in demand.

The pearl fishery, from the Rio-Hacha to King George's Islands in the Pacific, has been granted to Cochrane's nephew to render it more productive; the English will soon have their bells, divers, and the fishery will doubtless in a short time be wholly in their hands*.

Proceeding to a more general view of the exportations of Colombia, we shall see that those of the provinces of Venezuela, which formerly amounted to 4,400,000 piastres, have diminished of late years. This is proved by the number of

* They will perhaps realise the project of an inhabitant of Guayaquil, fetching divers from the Friendly Islands, and employing them in the pearl fishery of Panama.

vessels which enter the port of la Guayra *. In 1809, it amounted to 338, while, in 1823, there were only 228; on the other hand, the exportations, which, from this one place, amounted before the revolution to 2,805,225, are at present only 2,296,908. The reader is, of course, aware that these calculations are only approximate.

The war, by dispersing the slaves, has ruined many estates; however, a considerable quantity of cocoa, coffee, indigo, cotton, copper, oxen, mules, and horses, are still exported from Caracas. Guayana, which is a dependency of this province, furnishes besides a great deal of capiva balsam; and Varinas, nearly 10,000 quintals of excellent tobacco †.

The exportations of New Grenada have likewise experienced some diminution; speaking before of the revenues of Colombia, I estimated them, like those of the province of Venezuela, at 4,000,000 piastres‡. This sum is rather that of the produce which might easily be drawn from the country, than of the real exports, since several authors agree in estimating the exports of New Grenada at only 2,500,000 piastres; however, if we consider the prodigious quantity of

* This is known to be the most frequented port in the province of Venezuela.

† Native carbonate of soda is employed in the preparation of tobacco.

‡ Vide Note XX.

sugar lost by the bad process of the distillation of brandy, the cotton and indigo employed by the manufacturers of the country, who consume a great deal more than is necessary for the manufacture of their goods, and, lastly, if we consider the great number of fanegas of cocoa sent to the provinces in the plains, and which is paid for in cattle and other produce, it will be admitted that, on the one hand, the enormous losses caused by the ignorance of the farmers and manufacturers, and on the other, the barter lately introduced between New Grenada and Caracas, and the northern provinces of Peru, may, without any fear of exaggeration, allow us to estimate the exports of New Grenada in prosperous years at four millions of piastres. Nevertheless, it is thought that three-eighths only of this amount find their way into foreign hands.

This state of things will long continue; it costs Colombia 500,000 piastres annually, or 25,000,000 francs in ten years; this is the half of the gold and silver in plate and coin which the country possessed before the revolution. If this large sum, which has gone to England to pay the balance of the importations and exportations, has caused much misery in New Grenada, it may, in the sequel, produce great advantages, and in the following manner. Of the four millions of colonial goods which the country produces, three-eighths go to foreigners: three other eighths

are employed to the great detriment of commerce, on account of the deficiency of the Colombians in the knowledge of chemistry and mechanics; lastly, the two remaining eighths go to the inhabitants of the plains. The partiality of the latter for sugar and cocoa, and the eagerness of the inhabitants of the Andes to possess cattle will perpetuate the commercial relations between these two people; they will continue, notwithstanding the peace with Spain, and the facility of finding other markets. The millions of piastres of colonial productions, which, in consequence of the war, go to the plains, will not be restored to foreign commerce; but the necessity of supplying the demand of Europe, and of restoring the balance between the exports and imports, will doubtless give a new stimulus to agriculture.

In general, I think that the exportations of New Grenada have suffered, since the revolution, an annual diminution of 500,000 piastres; while, before, they exceeded the imports by an equal sum, since, instead of having to make the balance of its commerce in money, Colombia received, on the contrary, large sums from Mexico through the medium of Spain*.

* Colonial produce has risen in price in the ports of Colombia since the revolution, only because it has become more scarce. This dearness, therefore, has prevented the difference between the imports and exports from being under that which I

The English of Jamaica carry on almost the whole of the import trade; it may amount to eight millions of piastres; a great part is paid in money, because, besides the reasons I have given above, the natives of South America, the only traders who make voyages to Jamaica, where the purchases of manufactures are made, find it much more convenient to conclude their bargains upon credit, or to deal for ready money, than to have the trouble of making up a cargo at home. They do not understand, like the Spaniards, the mode of selling their goods by retail; Caracas has retained the barter trade in preference to New Grenada, because more foreigners visit its ports. Guayaquil enjoys the same advantage.

List of the Merchandise consumed in the republic of Colombia.*

ARTICLES	PRICE at Jamaica				PRICE at Santa-Fé de Bogotá			
	f	c	f	c	f	c	f	c
Fine Cloth 5/4 blue and black 3/4 yard	30		to	35	65		to	70
do 5/4 crimson do.			do.				do.	
do 5/4 second blue and black do	17			18	35			38
do 3/4 ordinary do	7	50		8	14			15
Fine Casimirs 3/4 sorted colours do	10			11	16			17
do 3/4 second ditto do.	4	30		5	8	50		9
Calicoes 5/4 36 ells, 3/4 piece	55			60	80			90
do 3/4 34 ells, do.	30			35	60			65
White Calico 5/4 15 ells, do.	19			20	30			35
Blue ditto 5/4 15 ells, do.	25			30	15			50
do. 3/4 3/4 ell.	2	50		3	1	50		5
Dimity white and coloured, 3/4 ell.	3			3	50			5
Naukeen blue, 3/4 piece	7			8	14			15
do yellow, broad, do.	4	50		5	11			12
do do narrow, do.	3	50		4	6	50		7
Calinucks 5/4 3/4 yard.	5			5	8	50		9
Printed cottons of fine colours, 20 ells, 3/4 piece	25			25	50			45
do ordinary do.	15			15	50			30
Ribbons fig sorted, 24 ells, No 1 to 3, 3/4 piece	2			10	3	50		20
do. Satin No. 1 to 6, do	7			12	10			20
Silk twisted, crimson, blue and black 3/4 lb.	15			16	15			10
Handkerchiefs of white muslin, 3/4 dozen	15	50		16	25			30
do. ordinary do.	3			3	50			6
Shawls of painted calico, 5/4 do.	60			65	90			100
do. of Cashmir 5/4 3/4 shawl.	25			..	40			15
Bretagne of cotton, 4 ells, 3/4 piece	2			2	25			3
do of thread, 6 ells, do.	14			20	30			35
Handkerchiefs cotton, coloured, 3/4 dozen	15			16	25			30
Stockings cotton, fine 3/4 dozen	60			65	100			110
do. ordinary, do.	15			18	30			40
Camlets, 26 ells, 3/4 piece	150			160	320			350
Paper florette, 3/4 ream	25			30	50			60
Muslin white, 9 ells, 3/4 piece	20			..	10			50
Cambric white, 9 ells, do.	20			..	35			40
Hats (men's) fine	25			..	80			..
Iron in bars, 3/4 quintal.	10			50	100			120
Steel, do.	55			60	110			150
Tin (per bac of 300 plates).	60			75	150			170
Brandy, barrel of 80 bottles.	150			165	150			375
Wines dry, Spanish, demigan of 20 bottles.	25			30	100			120
Wines of Bourdeaux, the box of 25 bottles	25			..	80			90
Almonds dry, 3/4 quintal.	120			..	300			350
Raisins dry, 3/4 box of 25 lb.	15			..	10			50
Shoes, women's, 3/4 dozen	96			..	168			..
Velvet, cotton, 3/4 ell	3			..	6			..
Linon, Irish, 3/4 piece of 19 ells	10			..

Such are the goods most generally in demand, and the sale of which is most certain.

An assortment of hardware would yield considerable profit: for, in this country they have neither pick-axes, shovels, spades, nor locks; they receive from abroad files, saws, hammers, &c. &c.*

Articles of luxury are still too dear for the inhabitants, whether they have been really ruined by the wars, or whether the loss of a portion of their property, in consequence of the revolution, has induced them to conceal a part of it, in order to save it from the rapacity of the military or the demands of government. The ladies of the capital do not buy fifty shawls, and twenty pieces of silk in a year; they purchase nothing but false jewels and trinkets. A great proportion of the people clothe themselves in cottons or woollens made in the country.

The coin is the same as that which was current in the time of the Spanish government. They have began however to substitute others in their stead; the silver money coined now is of a lower standard than the old coin. The standard of the gold coin is said not to have been lowered; copper to the amount of 1,200,000 piastres has just been coined, it is the first money of that metal seen in this country.

* Vide note XXII.

All the maritime commerce is carried on in the ports of Guayra, Rio-Hacha, Santa-Martha, Carthagena, Chagres, Porto-Bello, Panama and Guayaquil. Foreigners do not much frequent San-Tome, Puerto Cabello, Maracaïbo, on the Gulf of Mexico, and San-Buenaventura on the Pacific.

The English—in appointing consuls at Guayra, the port of Venezuela; at Maracaïbo, one of the principal issues of the Cordillera; at Carthagena, the port of the Magdalena; at Panama, the key of the Pacific—have therefore taken the most judicious course; it is surprising they have not sent any to San Tome and Guayaquil.

Some French vessels, a pretty considerable number of North Americans with cargoes of flower, salt fish, and deals, enter into competition with the English; the vessels of the latter, after having landed the merchandize they bring, return with balast, but carrying away the gold and silver, the spoils of America.*

The fear of pirates, who are numerous in the Archipelagos along the coast of America, from Darien to the Rio-Bravo, the infrequent communication between the several provinces, the scarcity of produce, and the facility which the English ships afford, prevent the coasting trade between the ports on the gulf of Mexico; it is

* Vide note XXII.

carried on with activity only on the Pacific, and even there not by the Colombians. Ships from Peru laden with onions, garlick, scallions, and straw hats go to Panama, where they take in return English goods which they convey to their own country. Without this assistance in the Pacific, without that of the English in the gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic, would it be possible to carry on an intercourse with the departments in canoes, which are in general the only vessels the Colombians possess?