

## CHAPTER VI.

Situation of the country from 1498 to 1781. — The ancient inhabitants—Their customs—Their manners—Commercial, religious and military conquests—Quesada—Decrease of the Indian population—Negroes—Their Condition—Mixture of the races—Ports—Churches—Villages—Towns—Mines—Colonial agriculture—European agriculture—Industry—Spanish Government—Profound peace.

WHEN America was first discovered, savages of unconquerable ferocity and courage inhabited the beautiful plains of Cumana, Caracas, as well as those watered by the Apure and Oronooko; continually wandering in these impregnable retreats, a few fruits, or the produce of the chase constituted their only food; the earth in summer, or the shelter of trees in the rainy season, served them for bed and habitation: they were almost naked; the rude paintings with which they covered their bodies, the bones or teeth of animals with which they loaded their ears, and the rings of gold which they appended from their nostrils, were the most refined ornaments they had invented; the feathers of birds was the usual covering of their heads, and the spoils of wild beasts that of the body. Ambition however slumbered amidst all this wretchedness; the supreme command was the object of their most ardent vows;

it was the recompense of the most painful trials; the least expression of complaint was punished by exclusion. What need then had these barbarians of a chief? what differences were to be decided? what spoils, what conquests were to be shared?—The bloody corpses of their enemies; for the greater part of them, when the chase failed, fed upon the palpitating limbs of their prisoners; there were but few tribes who disliked these horrible repasts.

In the mountains, on the contrary, the manners were ameliorated. The rich province of Antioquia alone was still addicted to blood; while in the plain in which Santa-Fè was afterwards built, the nation of the Moscas already possessed some laws. The communications between different villages were safe and frequent. Agriculture commenced to be in esteem, property was respected, the towns had habitations tolerably commodious and the people were dressed with decency. Without being surrounded by all that splendour to be found in the courts of Tenochtitlan and Cusco, that of the chief of Cundinamarca, to whom the Spaniards gave the title of king, was magnificent. Religion possessed its temples, altars and priests. Of all the Indians who inhabited these vast regions, the Moscas were the only ones who restricted the offering to their Gods, the sun and moon, to birds which they had previously taught to pronounce some words of their language, in order that the

cheated divinities might take them for human victims. Every where else, nothing but human victims were offered, and young persons of both sexes brought up to be butchered in these horrid sacrifices, were sold at a most enormous price.

Upon hearing of the discovery of the new world, the most savage inhabitants of which wore collars and bracelets of gold, the Spanish soldiers, weary of European warfare, which now afforded them but a poor booty, and the Moors and Jews, impatient of the yoke, to which they had recently been subjected, bid adieu to Europe, and set off to visit these new lands, and to find another country. But along the whole coast of South America, which is washed by the sea of the Antilles, they were repulsed by the Indians, and found all their flattering hopes disappointed. These misfortunes caused so general a despondency, that the Spanish government found itself obliged to offer the conquest of Venezuela to the highest bidder.\*

It was undertaken by some german merchants in 1528, who executed it with all the cruelty imaginable.†

They succeeded in gaining possession of the

\* The fact is that Charles V having borrowed considerable sums from the Welsers of Ausbourg, at that time the richest merchants in Europe, offered them the province of Venezuela, in payment, and they accepted it as a fief of Castille. See Raynal, *Histoire des Indes*.—*Translator*.

† Depons, tome I, p. 77.

coast, and had already erected habitations at some distance in the interior; these were however continually reduced to ashes by the savages who had taken refuge in the woods, and the terrified colonists, scarcely dared to quit their palisaded fortresses.—

Religion now undertook to put a stop to these excesses, and to make a conquest which the sword had been unable to effect. Missionaries penetrated into the wild retreats of the fugitive Indians. The greater number of these peaceful conquerors became the victims of their zeal. Those who had the good fortune to escape, obtained victory after victory; and as they advanced, founded churches of thatch and rushes; at length, they arrived on the borders of the Oronooko, after having opened a safe communication between that river and Venezuela, by means of the asylums, inviolable even for the savages, which they had erected at intervals.

In the mean time, the soldiers jealous of the glory of Pizarro and Cortes, scaled the Cordillera under the command of Quesada, and subdued empires. In fact this chief, stimulated by the seductive accounts of a great number of Indians who, pointing to the south, had assured him that he would find in that direction a rich and powerful empire, set off from St. Martha in the month of April 1536, at the head of six hundred and twenty infantry, and eighty-five cavalry. It was

with infinite difficulty that his slight and ill constructed boats could ascend the Magdalena, but the obstacles opposed to him by this river, instead of arresting his progress, only inflamed his courage. A great number of his brave companions perished either with fatigue or want. Nothing, however, could daunt him: he attacked the Indians inhabiting the canton, where Velez has since been built, gained an easy conquest, traversed their territory, and victoriously descended into the beautiful plains of Ibate and Bogota. His valour had not been abused by idle tales. The province of Cundinamarca, since called Santa-Fè, was very rich. Powerful princes, called zipas, at the head of a feudal government, ruled the country, and protected an industry which had already begun to develop itself; their temples, and palaces of straw, contained no inconsiderable treasure.

Thus a few bold and enterprising men, in the course of one year, effected the conquest of those countries to which the name of the Viceroyalty of New Grenada has since been given, but which form only one portion of it\*. The proofs of a movement towards civilisation was every where observable among the Indians. The avarice of the Spaniards, increased by this circumstance, sought only after new conquests. Neither the

\* The Indians were not wanting in courage, but the Spaniards were in the sixteenth century what the French were in the nineteenth, fortunate and invincible.

badness of the roads, the want of provisions, the oppressive intensity of the heat, nor the poisoned arrows of the natives, could damp their enterprising courage. Some adventurers, collecting a few soldiers in the ports of the sea of the Antilles, and furnished with ammunition, proceeded to conquer kingdoms.

Not less brave than Pizarro, Benalcazar, at first his lieutenant, became his rival in glory. Quito, Pasto, Popayan, and the valley of Cauca, acknowledged his authority. Then, passing the Quindiu and the Magdalena, and arriving in the plain of Bogota, at the moment when Quesada had completed its conquest, he became one of the founders of the capital of these rich possessions.

Upon hearing the recital of so many famous exploits, at the sight of the fields of battle, and the impregnable places where the Spaniards fought, it is difficult to explain how they obtained such rapid and astonishing success, especially if credit be given to the accounts of the first historians, of the considerable number of inhabitants who were found there. But, already mistress of the coasts of Africa, Spain only abandoned them for those of America, because the population of the latter were found to be less numerous and warlike. Besides, being assisted by the intestine quarrels among the Indians, the Spanish captains every where found traitors to

he gained over ; these acted as guides, and discovered the ambushes laid for them, while women served them as interpreters and spies.

Recruiting was particularly carried on at St. Domingo ; this island was already filled with negroes and mulattoes ; they were formed into regiments, and sent over to the continent. These men were the best soldiers that could be employed in this burning climate. It is doubtless by inheritance that the Indians still indulge an implacable hatred against men of colour.

These, after having contributed to the conquest of such rich empires, were now to assist in peopling them ; for the conquerors having imprudently employed in the mines, and in the labours of the field, the Indians, for a long time accustomed to idleness, and incapable of working in the burning lands of the tropics, where their fathers were not born, had sunk under the weight of fatigues, which were indeed light, but to which they were not accustomed. Let the white and feeble population of our Antilles be forced by their masters to dig the earth for a few days, exposed to the burning heat of the sun, although that under which they were born, and the race will gradually sink, and at last entirely disappear. This was what happened in the American archipelago ; at the end of two centuries none of the natives were to be found. Those of the plains of Venezuela, would likewise have

disappeared had they not taken refuge in the forests of Oronooko.

Such was not the case in the mountains ; the painful labours of agriculture were not fatal to any of the Indians, because they were under a climate suited to their strength ; thus, the number of Indians, far from diminishing, was considerably increased.

The African then could alone resist the tropical heat ; he alone, could be forced against his inclination to labour without perishing from grief and fatigue. Permission was therefore asked of the Spanish government to allow the importation of them. The court of Madrid hesitated a long time before it would grant this dangerous privilege ; it was at length forced from it, in order to appease the cry of humanity which rose on behalf of the Indians, and to people those vast empires which, even before the conquest, presented so many deserts and solitudes.

Thus the negroes destined to cultivate the American soil, first entered as slaves into those countries, which they were one day to share with their masters. The latter not having been accompanied by women in their perilous expeditions, at first they took those of the vanquished nations, and soon afterwards, those of their slaves.

These last in their turn, fastened in the *encomiendas* to the same chain as the Indians, overcoming their antipathy to these companions



in misfortune, asked, and obtained leave to intermarry with them. It is thus that the entire population of Venezuela, the whole of whose features announce an Asiatic origin, assumed a thousand different hues ; the white colour, however, was considered as exclusively entitled to respect, and the women coveted the honour of leaving to their offspring this proud inheritance ; so that, in a short time, the number of these half whites, or children of Indians and Europeans, was prodigiously increased. A great portion of the Indian family soon became so amalgamated and confounded with them, as to induce the belief that they had been all massacred by the Spaniards.

At the same time, this family already much mixed, was further augmented by a multitude of negroes ; but, notwithstanding these numerous crossings of the different races, the honour of peopling the continent still belonged to the white race, and the number of men of colour was far less than in the Antilles, where the white colour had a constant tendency to lose itself in that of the blacks.

Having become masters of the coasts, the Spaniards lost no time in building several forts, where, defended from sudden surprise and always ready to embark on the first serious attack, they prepared for the conquest of the interior provinces. Their positions were well

chosen, they availed themselves of the suggestions of nature, which, in different parts, offered them places proper for resisting on one hand, external enemies, already jealous of their conquest, and on the other, those who in the interior, were meditating but too late to wrest them from them. Puerto Cabello, la Guayra, defended Venezuela ; Maracaybo, the entrance of the Cordillera, Santa Martha and Carthagena, the rich canal of the Magdalena ; San Thomas, the Orinoco ; Panama, the important passage of the two seas. Their flag was hoisted on several points of the coasts of the South Sea ; and Spain, in these latitudes then unknown to the nations of Europe, was not under the necessity of making its sovereignty otherwise respected.

Upon advancing into the interior of the country, they never neglected building a temple. They had taught the Indians to respect these asylums, by granting them their lives, when, after a defeat, they fled to them : these churches also served to induce the savages to quit their forests, by the attraction of the ceremonies in which the Spaniards always display much magnificence.

But if they desired to establish themselves in places inhabited by these ferocious nations, the house of the curate was always fortified, while a ditch dug around the inclosure of the village, defended it against a surprise ; notwithstanding

these precautions, numbers of them were destroyed by the Panches and the Andaquis. Better informed of the enterprises and designs of the Spaniards, these two tribes waged a long and cruel war with them as late as the commencement of the last century.

Although the establishments of New Grenada became every day more important, the people were still poor; churches alone were ornamented, the dwellings were nothing but huts of mud and straw. To possess a cock and a hen, was to be rich; a cow, a bull, and a horse, were a fortune. It was not till the seventeenth century, that some fowls were seen at Bogota, and the name of him who first introduced them, has been preserved with almost religious veneration.

Provisions were then scarce and dear; the usual food was the fruits of the earth, which were exceedingly multiplied, for no one ever travelled without carrying seeds with him. Glory consisted in gathering a new fruit, and luxury in presenting it to one's friend.

After the lapse of a century, the face of the continent was changed; forests were cut down to make room for orchards. Cattle were multiplied in the rich pastures which bordered the banks of the rivers, horses and mules became more common; and man, who without their assistance, laboured with difficulty, could, when possessing them, undertake larger operations,

open roads, and increase the number of villages, for he was then enabled to transport at a small expence the produce of his fields.

The villages were now enlarged, and the wretched fortifications, which formerly enclosed them, fell into ruins. Before the eighteenth century, towns began to be raised, at the head of which the capital Santa-Fè soon equalled those of Europe of the third class.

This increase of the population occasioned a new division of South America. In 1718, New Grenada, dependent upon Peru, was erected into a viceroyalty; and in 1731, the provinces of Venezuela were placed under a particular government.

Thus, in the space of a century, from a few scattered tribes of cannibals, and African slaves, a new Spanish people had arisen, having the same worship, government, laws, customs, and language; Spain had not founded colonies, but had created nations and empires. Before being agriculturists, the first American colonists were merchants; this so enriched the maritime towns, that they soon acquired greater importance and extent than those of the interior. Carthagena and Panama especially became rich and populous. Afterwards, without disparagement to their interests, they found rivals in the inland towns, which, at length, eclipsed them when the people became agriculturists. Caracas, Santa-Fè, and

Quito, had no equals on the unhealthy coasts of the sea.

Before undertaking any agricultural schemes of importance, capital was necessary. At the time of the conquest, the Spanish soldiers soon dissipated what they had gained by pillage. The Jews and Moors, who had embraced christianity, in order to be allowed to enter America, had bought up these spoils at a low rate ; and, being for the most part established at Popayan and Antioquia, they commenced working the mines so abundant in these provinces, and which had already been turned to some account by the Indians. Africans, transported at a vast expense into these distant countries, dug trenches in every direction, and following the system, which they had seen adopted in their own country, confined themselves to washing the earth.

The metal at length appeared in large quantities, and Spain then found that, if the conquest of Mexico had put her in possession of the richest silver mines in the world, that of New Grenada, had given her a territory abounding in gold. She had established a mint at Mexico, another at Popayan, and a third at Santa-Fè ; notwithstanding the clumsy method of the negroes, more than two millions of gold piastres were annually produced from the smelting houses of New Grenada. Previously to the introduction of these establish-

ments, *macuquina* was the only money struck: this was a shapeless coin, without border or effigy of the prince; individuals also could obtain the right of coining money, upon payment of a small *douceur* \*. As may be supposed, Spain did not receive the whole of this precious metal; on the contrary, she was obliged to pay a considerable part of the local expenses with money drawn from Mexico. The towns, however, were increased and beautified, and agriculture began to be in repute.

It was divided into colonial agriculture and European agriculture: the former, in more able hands, would have made immense progress; sugar, coffee, and cocoa, grew with wonderful fecundity; the indigo and the cotton-tree were indigenous and wild plants. But all these were neglected; Caracas alone undertook to attend to them, and its exportations consequently doubled those of the viceroyalty. The provinces which formed New Grenada being composed, for the most part, of cold regions, had lavished their money, and the sweat of their brow in cultivating our grains and fruits; but with such little method, that they scarcely could produce sufficient for their own consumption. Fruits, abandoned to the care of nature, resembled those of Europe in appearance rather than in taste.

\* *Jove. Memoria al virey Samanon.*

The industry of all these countries was but very homely: a few manufactures of cottons for the clothing of the people, were to be found, and nothing more. Spain, upon this subject, was inexorable, notwithstanding her own manufactures were very limited; and although she was thus obliged to purchase at foreign markets the articles necessary for her American colonies. Her only object, however, in these prohibitions, was a system of rule which should insure her an empire of three centuries. In fact, regarding their colonies as integral provinces of their empire, the kings of Spain had forbidden the culture of the vine at Quito, but had permitted it at Lima. Olive-trees were to be seen at Chili, while they were not allowed to be planted at Buenos Ayres. New Grenada was obliged to close up its silver mines, at the requisition of Mexico; who, rich in its metallic operations, did not possess the right of undertaking agricultural or other enterprises, which would have interrupted its relations with the mother country. The small number of the inhabitants, their ignorance, the mildness of their character, their docility, the authority of the clergy, rendered it easy to establish any form of government; but the distances, the difficulty of communication, were obstacles to its consolidation not easily to be surmounted: each revolt might produce a schism. The measures adopted were very sagacious, and displayed

a rare foresight in the advisers of Charles V. The habits of both people were monarchical, but the licence of warfare, and the independance of the savage life, had imparted both to the conquerors and the conquered an impatience of controul difficult to be overcome. Both parties acknowledged the superiority of the mother city, and felt sensible that they stood in need of its support; the former, for the peaceable enjoyment of their conquests: the latter, for the amelioration of their condition—all were anxious for a mixed government. In consequence, the superiority was preserved to the victor by the vice-royalty, and protection to the latter by the municipal code,—to all, a defence against European oppression by the establishment of audiences.

The country was divided into a vice-royalty and captaincy-general, subdivided into lieutenantancies, provinces, magistracies, commanderships and missions.

The government founded in America experienced the lot of all human institutions: it was disfigured by abuses, the municipal government degenerated into a tyrannical oligarchy, because intelligence was rarely to be met with. The members of the audiences, whose duty it was to defend the oppressed, became themselves the oppressors. The vice-roys were deceived, or affected to be so, and were careless of their duties from an eagerness to advance their fortune: and,



lastly, the Council of Castille, established in 1511, from the want of correct information, often pronounced erroneous decrees.

But notwithstanding all these defects, the Spanish colossus was firm and unshaken; its coasts were ravaged, its seaport towns burnt, and its fortresses besieged; but its territory was still untact. If Anson returned victorious from the South Sea, another English admiral, Vernon, being repulsed at Carthagea, retreated with his army in disgraceful flight, and found refuge in his fleet. Spain carefully guarded her widely-extended coasts; and, notwithstanding her misfortunes and her decadence, she left to America the greater part of the treasures drawn from her bosom, in order that these countries might enjoy a tranquillity unknown to the mother country, upon which England made war every twenty years, in order to deprive her of the little riches she received from her colonies.

It is an historical fact, unique of its kind, that, under the protection of a people few in number, without industry, without commerce, badly armed and defended by an ill-organized marine, a whole world enjoyed, without interruption, a peace of three centuries. At the end of a century, the roads were all safe, the cannibal tribes had fled far from civilization, or had received its benefits; morals, though not pure, were decent; religion, every where respected by

the people, drew still closer together the ties of society by the sacraments which render them indissoluble. A few soldiers in the capital formed the body-guard of the viceroy, but not a satellite was to be found in the other towns of the interior; the only use of arms was against the wild beasts. The different provinces had a free intercourse, which was kept up between the different provinces; that between New Grenada and Caracas was alone forbidden. The Spanish government, already foreseeing the dangerous ambition of the inhabitants of the plains, was anxious to prevent its crisis. The taxes were moderate, the navigation of the rivers, fishing, hunting, the clearing and draining of the lands, were all as yet unincumbered by any law. No right, but that of individuals, was as yet known; provided their property was respected, the cutting down of trees, the changing the course of rivers, the destruction of animals; in fact, an indulgence of every possible caprice was allowed, without paying any tax to government, or soliciting a special permission from rich and overgrown proprietors.