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Conclusion of the Introduction to Depons's Voyages.

The first chapter is devoted to the discovery and conquest of the country. It will thence appear that the Spaniards established themselves in Terra Firma, at least more slowly, if not with more difficulty, than in any other part of America. This proceeded as much from the wrong measures pursued in the beginning, as from the preference given by the Spaniards to Mexico and Peru, where the passion for mines found more to gratify it.

To this chapter succeeds the summary description of the country, such as it was at the epoch when the Spaniards established themselves in it. It appeared to me that I ought to make known its temperature, soil, native productions, forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and harbours, before I treated of its institutions, and the territorial riches which belong to the genius and industry of the conquerors. All these subjects are discussed in the second chapter.

Then follows a chapter on the population as well European as African. Herein, I explain the means employed to obtain an annual statement of each of these classes; the rank which their laws assign them in society; the pains taken by the Spanish government to prevent the unpeopling of the mother country by emigration to America; the severity of the laws against the admission of foreigners into the Spanish possessions; the manners which the European Spaniards carry thither; the manners and customs of the creoles; the condition of the slaves; and of their freedom, &c. &c.

The fourth chapter treats solely of the Indians. I was unwilling to confound this primitive population with the modern mass of people; because it offers peculiarities of sufficient curiosity to occupy a birth of its own. Local tradition and public monuments have given me, concerning the Indian forms of government before the conquest, as well as their character and customs, details worthy of being offered to the consideration of the observer. The mode prescribed by the laws for weaning them from their forests and leading them to social life is not void of interest.— Here we see the greatest persuasives of morality baffled by the aversion which the savages have for religious and civilized customs. Their primitive manners endure for ages without undergoing the slightest change; their propensity to terror, their superstitions, their proneness to intoxication, incest, lying and laziness, have resisted for more than a hundred and fifty years, the efforts made by the missionaries to make them abandon these pernicious practices. You preach to them to no purpose the existence of a good, mild and merciful God, while they have no faith in any thing but the devil. They furnish an example, rare among men, of not admitting a good principle to counbalance a bad one. The slowness of their progress to civilization, or rather their total want of it, proceeds from the too great lenity with which the laws direct them to be treated. By these, their tastes, and fancies are indulged, instead of being opposed. The advice of friendship is employed in the place of reproof. And the endeavours to make them men are such as to keep them in perpetual infancy. The examination of these questions ends in a plan of a new system, which would render them more useful both to the colony and the parent state.

In the fifth chapter is detailed the form of government which Spain has devised for her colonies; together with the kind of connection contrived to keep them independent; the functions and prerogatives of the principal officers appointed by the king; the tribunals and general police; and the organization, number and distribution of the troops destined for the defence of the country. It may be remarked that the laws forming the Spanish colonial code are founded in great foresight and profound wisdom. The means employed to guard the national sovereignty from infringements, and to prevent the abuses of authority which the great distance from the mother country might encourage, are so ingeniously combined that they may be regarded as a master-piece of legislation for modern colonies, as to their political connection with the mother country.

It is natural indeed to suppose that territories situated from two to five thousand leagues from the centre of authority, being twenty times more extensive and with a more numerous population, have not remained during three hundred years, in a steady and untroubled dependence, nor without giving serious employment to the genius and contemplation of the legislator. I ascribe the whole merit to the council of the Indies, to that supreme tribunal which decides upon all infractions of the laws, and also all usurpations of power in Spanish America; and from which proceeds all the regulations and decrees relating to the government of the colonies. Europe does not furnish an example of a tribunal whose decisions have been for three hundred years so unanimous and wise as those of the council of the Indies have been and continue to be. In this long course of experience calumny has not dared to reproach them with the smallest act as tarnished with prejudice, ignorance or favour.

Religion is too intimately blended with politics in the Spanish government, to be dispensed with in the history which I publish. The jurisdiction of the tribunals of the inquisition, much more mild and limited than they were formerly; the authority of the Holy See, which by concessions of the early popes was restricted in the Spanish dominions to the sole prerogative of investing the acts of the king with canonical forms; the powers of the king as patron of the Indies; the organization of the clergy; the competency of the ecclesiastical tribunals, the mode of nominating bishops, canons and priests; and the functions of missionaries are so many objects, the discussion of which cannot but be interesting to the reader. This chapter is closed by an examination of the delicate question whether churches ought to be asylums.

The seventh chapter contains all that relates to agriculture. It opens with the titles which the kings of Spain have obtained, to make grants of land in the new world. Then follows the successive methods of disposing of these lands; I then pass to the analysis of the soil of eastern Terra Firma, and to the different articles cultivated there. I give upon the raising and manufacturing, or the preparation of the produce, all the details which a residence of twenty-two years in the colonies, has rendered familiar to me. This chapter has been so carefully compiled as not to be uninteresting to any modern colonies.—Lastly, I examine the causes why cultivation is on the decline in Terra Firma, and I point out the means of restoring to it that activity which it has lately lost.

Territorial productions necessarily attract commerce, this chapter therefore, is naturally inserted after that on cultivation. The commercial system which Spain follows in respect to her colonies, had forced me to recite the alterations which it has undergone, and it obliges me to say, in honor of Spain, that this system vicious in its origin, has been gradually reformed in the manner that is most conformable to the interests of a mother country, which cannot avoid supplying her colonies with foreign manufactures. Her imports, apparently exorbitant, are however, found upon reflection to be neither the offspring of accident nor of ignorance, but the necessary consequence of the fundamental error of the system. And it is now thirty years since their fiscal laws have been smoothed of all their roughness, and that all the sacrifices have been made in favor of commerce, which could be reasonably expected.

Independent of its connexions with the mother country, the eastern part of Terra Firma, enjoys with the other Spanish possessions in America, a very advantageous and reciprocal trade; among these are Porto Rico, Cuba, Vera Cruz, Carthagena, and St. Martha.

The laws permit the exportation to the different colonies near the Gulf of Mexico, the surplus of their live stock, hides, skins, drugs, and even other articles as well as cacao, with the leave of the intendant, which he readily grants; I next treat of contraband, which also has its system. All these different subjects enter into my 8th chapter, and are concluded by an enquiry into the consular establishment at Caraccas, and by the rates of duties on imports and exports.

In the 9th chapter, I have comprised every thing which relates to the finances. It will thence be apparent that until 1728, when the company of Guipuscoa was established, the resources of the eastern part of Terra Firma were so trifling that Spain was obliged to send yearly from Mexico money for the officers, troops, and all other public expenses. In 1777, the finances of these provinces underwent an organization, which proves the importance they had already attained. The captain-general of Caraccas was discharged from the care of superintending them, and that business was delegated to an intendant; this gave to the whole department a new order and a new lustre. After having analysed the functions and prerogatives of the intendant, and of the officers of the customs, I have recited the origin and object of each impost laid on the colonies, its assessment, its mode of collection, and its annual amount. This description is followed by a general table of receipts and expenditures.

I presume there are very few readers who will not think the details contained in the preceding chapters are fairly within the limits of history; but the promise I had made of leaving nothing untold concerning these interesting regions, has determined me to add particular to general information, by making known to my readers the resources and special subjects of industry in each department of the captain generalship of Caraccas. This point I have aimed at in the 10th chapter under the title of a *description of the towns and their dependencies.* I have delineated, not only the situation, temperature and population of each town, but likewise the character of the inhabitants, the quality of the adjacent lands, the employment or labor, the course of trade, the species of spontaneous production, the crops which are artificially raised and the rivers which water the respective regions, &c. &c. The like has been done in respect to the division of the provinces of the eastern part of Terra Firma into cabildos, erected to each town whose jurisdiction embraces all the adjoining villages as far as the boundary of the neighboring cabildo. A necessary consequence of this method is, that a circumstantial description of the seat of each cabildo and its territory, constitutes the most complete and instructive topography which can be given of this country.

Spanish Guiana occupies the 11th chapter. I have condensed in it all that I have to say on this province, for the purpose of an advantageous display of it, and to give it that distinguished rank to which it is entitled in the catalogue of important colonies. Watered by the Oronoko, which runs through it a distance of five hundred leagues, and which receives in its course a prodigious number of considerable rivers, Spanish Guiana is destined by nature to become the most productive province of America, the commercial centre of its produce, as well as of the neighboring provinces, whose navigable streams empty into the Oronoko.

The navigation of this river, the mass of whose waters is at least equal to that of the Amazons, having hitherto been a secret among a few pilots, I have considered it a matter of necessity to explain it very minutely; I have begun with the navigation of the upper part of the river towards the capital of Guiana. It offers but little that interests the foreign merchant, because all the business is done by the inhabitants of the country, who bring the produce to St. Tome. It is therefore, to the long and perilous navigation of the Oronoko from its mouths to St. Tome, that my researches have been chiefly directed. The unacquainted navigator must be extremely fortunate in his choice of an entrance, if he meets with no obstacle in sailing up the Oronoko, as it has fifty outlets, almost all of which are innavigable to any great distance, and which would generally lead him into a labyrinth amidst numberless islands, from which he could extricate himself but with difficulty, even with the aid of the compass. Even the most navigable branches of the Oronoko are not without these difficulties; they do not admit vessels of all capacities. Its bed, overspread with islands, shoals and rocks, offers a continued series of impediments which practice alone can overcome. This chapter is not the less interesting, inasmuch as it gives information of which geography and navigation stand in great need, respecting one of the most important rivers of the globe. My discussion, therefore, has the merit of being the only one that has appeared, and I can confidently vouch for its correctness. The plan of the Oronoko, from its outlets to St. Tome, was executed by the order of the king, and all the drafts relative to this undertaking have been deposited in the office of the ministry.

The English, whose views are all directed to commerce, are the only foreigners who have as much information as the Spaniards themselves, on the navigation of the Oronoko, the captain generalship of Caraccas, and the other Spanish possessions; and these they inundate with contraband wares and merchandize.

Should I be happy enough to have a value set upon my writings equal to the toil they have cost me, I shall consider as a favor of heaven the events which cast me on the 18th of January 1801, upon the coasts of Terra Firma. And in this case I ought to declare my obligation to gen. Leclerc, for a considerable part of my success.

As soon as he arrived at St. Domingo at the head of the army sent to restore order there, I lost no time in submitting to him my remarks on this colony, and explaining to him my literary project. The part of his answer relative to this latter subject, is dated 10th Thermidor, 10th year, and couched in the following terms:

"I regret that the wants of the army which I command, do not enable me to appropriate at this moment, to the furtherance of natural history, the necessary sums. The time is certainly not remote, when I shall have it in my power to do all I wish in this respect. In the mean time I beg you to accept of one thousand dollars, which I have remitted on your account; I hope this sum will give you the means of continuing your useful labours. I shall not suffer the minister of the interior to remain ignorant of the fact, that on the American continent there is a Frenchman occupied in useful enquiries."

This pecuniary assistance was not repeated by reason of the disastrous event of his death. I had therefore no further encouragement than the opinion of the interest which the commander in chief felt in my enterprize. His exhortation to me to continue my labor held out to me positive and direct claims upon the gratitude of the government: and there was no need of any further inducement than that, to make me redouble my zeal, activity and application, and to sacrifice every thing to the correctness, clearness and precision requisite in the painful task of collecting genuine information relative to those vast and highly favored countries.

OBSERVATIONS,

Extracted from the Journals of William Dunbar, esq. and Doctor Hunter.

(CONTINUED.)

At noon, on the 15th November, they passed the island of Mallet, and at 90 yards north east from the upper point of the island, by a good observation ascertained their latitude to be 32 deg. 59 min. 27 sec. 5 N. or two seconds and a half of latitude south of the dividing line between the territories of Orleans and Louisiana. The bed of the river along this alluvial country, is generally covered with water, and the navigation uninterrupted; but in the afternoon of this day, they passed three contiguous sand bars, or beaches, called "*les trois battures*," and before evening the "*bayau de grand marais*," or great marsh creek on the right, and "*la Cypreri Chatteleraut*," a point of high land on the other side, which reaches within half a mile of the river. As they advanced towards the marais de saline on the right, a stratum of dirty white clay under the alluvial tract, shewed them to be leaving the sunken, and approaching the high land country. The salt lick marsh does not derive its name from any brackishness in the water of the lake or marsh, but from its contiguity to some of the licks, sometimes called "saline," and sometimes "glaise," generally found in a clay, compact enough for potters' ware. The bayau de la Tulipe forms a communication between the lake and the river. Opposite to this place, there is a point of high land, forming a promontory, advancing within a mile of the river, and to which boats resort when the low grounds are under water. A short league above is the mouth of the grand bayau de la Saline (Salt Lick creek.) This creek is of a considerable length, and navigable for small boats. The hunters ascend it, to one hundred of their leagues, in pursuit of game, and all agree that none of the springs which feed this creek are salt. It has obtained its name from the many salt licks which have been discovered in its vicinity. Although most of these licks, by digging, furnish water which holds marine salt in solution, there exists no reason for believing that many of them would produce nitre. Notwithstanding this low and alluvial tract appears in all respects well adapted to the growth of the long moss (tilandsia,) none was observed since entering it in lat. 32 d. 32 m. and as the pilot informed them none would be seen in their progress up the river. It is probable that the latitude of 33 deg. is about the northern limit of vegetation. The long leaf pine, frequently the growth of rich and even inundated land, was here observed in great abundance; the short leafed or pitch pine, on the contrary, is always found upon arid lands and generally in sandy and lofty situations.

This is the season when the poor settlers on the Washita turn out to make their annual hunt. The deer is now fat and the skins in perfection; the bear is now also in his best state, with regard to the quality of his fur, and the quantity of fat or oil he yields, as he has been feasting luxuriantly on the autumnal fruits of the forest. It is here well known that he does not confine himself, as some writers have supposed, to vegetable food; he is particularly fond of hogs flesh; sheep and calves are frequently his prey, and no animal escapes him which comes within his power, and which he is able to conquer. He often destroys the fawn, when chance throws it in his way; he cannot, however, discover it by smelling, notwithstanding the excellence of his scent, for nature has, as if for its protection, denied the fawn the property of leaving any effluvium upon its track, a property so powerful in the old deer.* The bear, unlike most other beasts of prey, does not kill the animal he has seized upon before he eats it; but regardless of its struggles, cries and lamentations, fastens upon it, and if the expression is allowable, devours it alive. The hunters count much on their profits from the oil drawn from the bears fat, which, at New Orleans, is always of ready sale, and much esteemed for its wholesomeness in cooking, being preferred to butter or hogs lard. It is found to keep longer than any other animal oil without becoming rancid; and boiling it, from time to time, upon sweet bay leaves, restores its sweetness, or facilitates its conservation.

In the afternoon of the 17th they passed some sand beaches, and over a few rapids. They had cane brakes on both sides of the river: the canes were small, but demonstrate that the water does not surmount the bank more than a few feet. The river begins to widen as they advance: the banks of the river shew the high land soil, with a stratum of three or four feet of alluvion deposited by the river upon it. This superstratum is greyish, and very sandy, with a small admixture of loam, indicative of the poverty of the mountains and uplands where the river rises. Near this they passed through a new and a very narrow channel, in which all the water of the river passes, except in time of freshes, when the interval forms an island. A little above this pass is a small clearing, called "Cache la Tulipe" (Tulip's hiding place); this is the name of a French hunter who here concealed his property. It continues the practice of both the white and red hunters to leave their skins, &c. often suspended to poles, or laid over a pole placed upon two forked posts, in sight of the river, until their return from hunting. These deposits are considered as sacred, and few examples exist of their being plundered. After passing the entrance of a bay, which within must form a great lake during the inundation, great numbers of the long leaf pine were observed; and the increased size of the canes along the river's bank, denoted a better and more elevated soil; on the left was a high hill (300 feet) covered with lofty pine trees.

The banks of the river present more the appearance of upland soil, the under stratum being a pale yellowish clay, and the alluvial soil of a dirty white, surmounted by a thin covering of a brown vegetable earth. The trees improve in appearance, growing to a considerable size and height, though yet inferior to those on the alluvial banks of the Mississippi. After passing the "Bayau de Hachis," on the left, points of high land, not subject to be overflowed, frequently touch the river, and the valley is said to be more than a league in breadth on both sides. On the left are pine hills, called "Code de Champignole." The river is not more than 50 or 60 yards wide. On the morning of the 20th they passed a number of sand beaches, and some rapids, but found good depth of water between them. A creek called "Chemin Couvert," which forms a deep ravine in the high lands, here enters the river; almost immediately above this is a rapid where the water in the river is confined to a channel of about 40 yards in width; above they had to quit the main channel, on account of the shallowness and rapidity of the water, and pass along a narrow channel of only 60 feet wide: without a guide a stranger might take this passage for a creek.

Notwithstanding the lateness of the season, and the northern latitude they were in, they this day met with an alligator. The banks of the river are covered with cane, or thick underbrush, frequently so interwoven with thorns and briars as to be impenetrable. Birch, maple, holly, and two kinds of wood to which names have not yet been given, except "water side wood," are here met with; as also persimons and small black grapes. The margin of the river is fringed with a variety of plants and vines, among which are several species of convolvulus.

On the left they passed a hill and cliff 100 feet perpendicular, crowned with pines, and called "Cote de Finn," (Finn's hill) from which a chain of high land continues some distance. The cliff presents the appearance of an ash colored clay. A little farther to the right is the Bayau d'Acasia (Locust creek.) The river varies here from 80 to 100 yards in width, presenting frequent indications of iron along its banks, and some thin strata of iron ore. The ore is from half an inch to 3 inches in thickness.

On the morning of the 22d of November, they arrived at the road of the Chadadoquis Indian nation, leading to the Arkansa nation; a little beyond this is the Ecora Fabri, (Fabri's cliffs) from 80 to 100 feet high; and a little distance above, a smaller cliff called, "Le Petit Ecor a Fabri," (the little cliff of Fabri:) these cliffs appear chiefly to be composed of ash coloured sand, with a stratum of clay at the base, such as runs all along under the bank of this river. Above these cliffs are several rapids; the current is swifter and denotes their ascent into a higher country: the water becomes clear, and equal to any in its very agreeable taste and as drinking water. In the river are immense beds of gravel and sand over which the water passes with great velocity in the season of its floods, carrying with it vast quantities of drift wood, which it piles up, in many places, to the height of 20 feet above the present surface, pointing out the difficulty and danger of navigation in certa[illegible]

** It may not be generally known to naturalists, that between the hoof of the deer, &c. there is found a sack, with its mouth inclining upwards, containing more or less of musk, and which, by escaping over the opening, in proportion to the secretion, causes the foot to leave a scent on the ground wherever it passes. During the rutting season this musk is so abundant, particularly in old males, as to be smelt by the hunters at a considerable distance.*