

CHAP. IV.

CHARACTER OF THE MISSIONARY GOVERNMENT.—PRESENT
STATE OF THE COUNTRY.—PRODUCE.—PEARL FISHERY.

During the rule of Father Salvatierra, the whole regulations relating to the property and conduct of the missions and the treatment of the natives, were, as already stated, reduced to a regular system; and this has been acted on ever since, with but slight deviation, even by the enemies of the order of Jesuits, who succeeded them. As affording the best security for the funds belonging to the missions, farms in Mexico were purchased by them. At the same time the payment of the royal salaries allowed to the missionaries was put on a better footing. These salaries were paid to the directors of the missions in Mexico, the missionaries having the equivalent value transmitted to them in the form of clothes, furniture, utensils, provisions, medicines, mules, &c. The garrisons and soldiers were paid by government, but they still continued under the authority of the fathers, except as regarded their internal discipline, and when they were engaged in matters of a purely military character. The following extracts from Father Venegas give a

tolerably clear view of the general economy of the missionaries both religious and civil: but it is necessary to recollect, in reading them, that the narrator is himself one of the order which he eulogises.

“At first the fathers subsisted all the Indians, who came to settle in villages, on condition that they should no longer wander among the woods and mountains, but be instructed in the faith: and in these charities, great part of the contributions of the benefactors, has been expended. And after they were thus brought together, it being impossible to subsist all, and equally so to make fields for sowing in many parts, either from the nature of the soil, want of water, or the innate indolence and sloth of the people, the following method was taken.—First, the missionaries supported all the Indians who attended divine service. Every morning and night they have an allowance of Atole, the name they give to their pottage, made of maize, boiled and afterwards bruised, macerated in water, and put a second time over the fire; at noon they are served with pozoli, or boiled maize, with fresh or salt meat, and fruits or vegetables, according as the mission is provided. In the same manner the Indian governor of the village, the sick, the aged, and the children of all the rancherias, male and female, from six to twelve years, are provided with food. Besides this, every week the same allowance is

given to all the Indians of two rancherias, male and female, in consideration that they all come in their order, two by two, to the head village of the mission, in order to renew their instructions. Lastly, every Sunday, all who attend divine service have a portion of victuals, and in passion week, the like is sent to all the rancherias.

The missionary priest likewise cloathes all his parishioners with serges, baize, and palmillas, a sort of coarse cloth woven in Old Spain; he also provides them with cloaks and blankets, which he procures from Mexico on his stipend. Those who can work are instructed by the fathers in the management of the fields, and watering the ground; the product of which is entirely for their own advantage; and the consequence is, that they gather it, and immediately waste the whole, unless the fathers take care to save it up, in order to make a proper distribution, or to send relief to another mission in necessity. Wine is the only product withheld from them, and this in order to prevent drunkenness; and it is for this reason, that though the vintages are but inconsiderable, some quantities of it, there being but few consumers in California, have been exported to New Spain, in exchange for other commodities. What wine the father has is chiefly given to the sick, whom he likewise supplies with medicines; so that a missionary and priest of

California, is not only charged with the care of their souls, but likewise with all the several duties of a father of a family; together with the several mechanical occupations from a labourer to a cook. He is likewise a tutor, apothecary, surgeon and physician to all: and this without the least profit, advantage or reward, spending his own substance, abridging himself of conveniencies, even necessities, to supply their wants.

In every mission newly founded, the father is attended by a soldier, who within certain bounds has the power of the captain of the garrison. When the father has assembled any rancherias, he appoints the person, whom he thinks most proper, as governor of the village: another Indian to take care of the church, and out of each rancheria, a person of the most promising morals, and particularly instructed, is appointed catechist. The governor's office is to keep peace and good order; and if any thing happens that he cannot remedy, he is to acquaint the father and soldier with it. The churchwarden is to take care of the church and keep it clean; he is also to take notice of those that fail coming to mass, and other exercises of devotion; those that do not behave with proper respect; and those who either return to their former superstitions, or betray any ill-will against the fathers, or disgust at the instructions. The catechist of the

rancheria summons them every morning before they go to the woods to repeat their prayers and catechism; and if any thing deserving animadversion happens in the rancheria, he acquaints the father of it.

During the absence of the father, either to visit villages and rancherias, attend the sick, or terminate quarrels, the soldier acts as his vicegerent, and has an eye to every thing. He is at the father's order to go wherever it is necessary; he can seize delinquents and mildly punish them, unless in capital cases, when he is to lay the case before the captain of the garrison, who is invested with the judicial power. Lesser faults are punished with whipping, and the greater with imprisonment or the stocks.

The first care is of the children, as the whole depends on their education. Some from all the missions are brought up at Loreto, which has a reading, writing, and singing school, with proper masters who come from the opposite coast. They become gradually polished by conversation; they are taught the Spanish, and afterwards are promoted to be churchwardens or catechists in their rancherias, where they are greatly respected. At the head villages every morning, the churchwarden assembles all the inhabitants in the church, whither the rancherias come by turns, and there the Te

Deum is sung. This is followed by the mass, and afterwards by the catechism, which is translated into their languages; and several times a week the whole concludes with an explication, or sermon; instructing and animating them in every part of the christian life. The adult christians then undertake some employment, or go among the woods in quest of sustenance. At night they all meet again in the church, and perform their devotions. Every Sunday they walk in procession round the village singing; they then return to the church, where a sermon is preached to them. The like is done at Loreto every Saturday, in Spanish, for the garrison.

No one is compelled by force to receive the faith; all who are baptized, desire it not only freely, and without the least compulsion, but all possible assurances are given of their sincerity and perseverance. The garrison and soldiers check the insults of the savages: but if the orders and intentions of his majesty, and the Spanish government be complied with, they never offer them the least injury, never so much as pursuing them unless provoked: the chief end of their service is no more than as a just and prudent safeguard for the lives of the missionaries."

What with the insuperable barrenness of the country and the injurious influence of the system of civilization—or more properly speaking *domesti-*

cation—so rigidly persevered in by the missionaries, the indigenous population of Lower California has greatly diminished, while the defect has not been in any degree supplied by the influx of strangers. Indeed the nature of the soil and the institutions of the Fathers conspire in forbidding all immigration. Humboldt states the total amount of the national population not to exceed nine thousand, rather more than half of which are the tributary converts of the Fathers. This estimate is perhaps too small. I can, however, state with confidence that, even at the present time, the population including all classes, does not exceed fourteen or fifteen thousand. Most of the missions are in a wretched condition, and the Indians poor and helpless, slaves both in body and mind, have no knowledge and no will but those of the Friars.

We shall defer all particular notice of their peculiar character and position until we come to give an account of Upper California.

The capital Loreto has less than three hundred inhabitants. The only town of any importance, as to size, is La Paz, which, together with San Antonio, contains perhaps a population of two thousand—most of them the mixed progeny of European seamen, Spanish creoles and Indians. The vicinity of a tolerable harbour (Pichilingo) renders this place of more importance.

The indomitable barrenness of Lower California, the more remarkable as contrasted with the fertility of the upper province, has not only necessarily kept at an extremely low ebb her agriculture and commerce, but has given the country so bad a character that its resources have fallen far below their intrinsic value. If the country is capable of producing little, the antiquated monastic institutions by which it is throughout possessed, are ill calculated to improve this little. The natural productions are nearly the same as those in Upper California. There are said to be many mines of gold and silver in the peninsula, but none are now worked, unless, indeed, we may except those of San Antonio near La Paz which still afford a trifling supply. Besides Indian corn, the sheltered vallies near the different missions produce a variety of fruit such as grapes, dates, figs, quinces, peaches, pears, olives. The dates, figs, &c. are dried and preserved, and exported; and wine is made from the grapes and also exported, as well as a kind of spirit distilled from the mescal. These articles, with pearls, tortoiseshell, a few bullock's hides, some dried beef, cheese, soap, &c. constitute all the exports which are, for the most part, sent to San Blas and Mazatlan in small coasting vessels. The imports are chiefly provisions and clothing, agricultural and domestic utensils, supplies for the ceremonies of the church and a small share of the ordinary luxuries of life.