

a heavy fall of rain, every separate drop of which I supposed sufficient to have beaten the puny warriors to the earth.

In sleeping they frequently suspend themselves by the feet, with their heads downwards, in the manner of some parrots.

These birds were great favorites of the ancient Mexicans. They used the feathers as ornaments for their superb mantles in the time of Montezuma, and in embroidering the pictures so much extolled by Cortez. Their name signifies in the Indian language beams or locks of the sun;—they are still worn by the Indian ladies as ornaments for the ears.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

Agriculture.—Wheat.—Barley.—Indian Corn, or Maize.—  
Fricollis.—Bananas.—The Great Aloe.—Pulque.

THE Agriculturists of New Spain, like the artists and manufacturers, are considerably behind those of Europe. The fineness of the soil and climate renders less labour and management necessary than with us; and the laying of manure on the land seems to be little practised. The outskirts of the cities furnish this article in abundance, yet it remains unemployed. Irrigation has been used from the earliest period. A simple plough of wood, pointed with iron, is drawn by two oxen, which are fastened to it by the horns; it is directed by an Indian with one hand, whilst with the

other he urges the animals on, with a stick armed with a point, as it is generally used to form the drills of proper extent for the maize; but when employed for wheat, a smaller share is introduced for that purpose.

The coa or spade is a simple triangular instrument of wood, armed with iron, and is used with great dexterity by the Indians.

The wheat is the finest I have ever seen. The fields are very extensive, and the grain is trodden out by mules, as it was formerly in Europe, and as it is still in Egypt, by Oxen.

Barley is not much in request, but it is sometimes given to horses, principally in a green state, instead of maize. I have no doubt but that excellent malt might be made from it.

The Indian corn, or maize, is very generally cultivated, and forms the supply of bread for the great mass of the people. It

is made into thin cakes, by soaking it in water, and grinding it into paste between stones. It is then baked on a stone over the fire, and makes an excellent and nutritious bread.

Small black beans called fricollis are in general demand all over New Spain: they form a part of every meal, and even strangers think them excellent. Immense fields of these are cultivated for the supply of the great cities.

Potatoes are not in common use, and are small and not well tasted; nor does the cultivation of these, or of other culinary vegetables, seem to be well understood; for, although all sorts are grown here, and are to be procured in the markets, yet most of them are inferior to the same species in the kitchen-gardens of Europe. I should except the onions (which are as white as

turnips and very mild), and the cauliflowers and cabbages.

The tropical fruits are not, I think, to be surpassed by any other part of the world. I have already mentioned, in my account of the markets, their very luxuriant appearance: few objects can give more pleasure to the newly arrived European. But those fruits that were originally imported from Europe are by no means equal to our own. This, however, I am convinced, is principally owing to want of attention, and knowledge in the art of cultivating them. The whole management, as I have previously hinted, is confided to Indians entirely ignorant of the European arts of horticulture; and the engrafting of fruit trees has not yet, I believe, been introduced.

The banana (the *musa*) is extensively

cultivated, and of great importance, furnishing the inhabitants in the warmer parts with a wholesome aliment. It is sold in the market of the capital both fresh and in a dried state.

The great American Aloe (*Agava Americana*), called here the *maguey*, is of the greatest consequence to the Mexicans, and very largely cultivated from Perote to Toluca, and I believe much further. From it is made the refreshing and favorite beverage called *pulque*. It is in universal request among the inhabitants of the Capital, Puebla, Toluca, &c. and such is the consumption, that the three cities just mentioned are said by Baron Humboldt to have paid duties upon it to the amount of 817,739 dollars in the year 1793. Plantations of the *agava* are very extensive between Chollula and San Martin, the great road running for miles through them.

They are set about five or six feet asunder, and in favorable situations come into bloom in about ten years, at which period the valuable liquor is to be procured. As soon as the owner perceives the plant preparing to throw up its long flower-stem, he cuts out the leaves which form its centre, and hollows it out into the shape of a bowl, at the same time removing most of the other leaves, so that the whole sap destined for their supply flows to the great stem, and is received by the bowl-shaped cavity, into which it runs with such rapidity as to require to be emptied several times a day, for a space of two months. The liquor, when collected, is placed in jars or skins; it undergoes a slight fermentation, which takes place in a few days, and is immediately fit for drinking. Strangers prefer it fresh, but the natives seldom take it till it has acquired a strong

taste, and a disagreeable fetid smell, denominated fuerte, when it is esteemed in high perfection.

A strong spirit, called pulque brandy, is distilled from the liquor. The leaves form the roofs of some Indian houses, and fences, ropes, thread, cloth, and paper are also made from it; some part of the plant is also used medicinally, and the root, prepared with sugar, is converted into dulces or sweetmeats.

Sugar is made by the Indians in most parts of Mexico, though formerly imported from Spain. It is sold in small cakes, at a very reasonable rate. Aguardiente, a spirit resembling whiskey, is obtained from the canes in large quantities.

Coffee is grown, though not very generally; I saw some, of an excellent sort, within three leagues of Xalappa: and during my stay, an English gentleman was in treaty for an extensive hacienda, with the

intention of cultivating this plant on a large scale.

Cotton of a very fine quality is abundantly produced in most of the warm parts, but is manufactured to great disadvantage by the natives. A variety, of a fine cinnamon colour, is sold by the Indians; it is abundant at Themascaltepec, and is, I believe, the same as that of which the East India nankeen is made. The machine for extracting the seed is not known, and this troublesome process is performed by hand. The Indians also expose for sale great quantities of coarse calico, of their own making.

Flax or hemp I did not see: the growth was discouraged by the Spaniards, though the temperate region is well adapted to their production. The same discouragement existed as to the manufacture of silk.

Chocolate, made from the cocoa, was in

general use in America before the first arrival of Europeans, and is still held in high estimation. In Mexico the consumption is very great. It is manufactured in a simple manner, but is excellent. The cocoa is not, however, the growth of the country, but is imported from Guatamala and South America. It is to be regretted that it is not commonly produced in Mexico, where it is so much an article of consumption. Chocolate is to be procured on a journey, when scarcely any thing else can be had; and is of superior flavour and more easy of digestion than any I ever met with elsewhere. In the capital great numbers of females are employed in making it; which they do by grinding it by hand, between stones, in the same manner as the tortilios or maize cakes are made, and it is a laborious process. It is singular that the cultivation of the cocoa was, in

the time of Montezuma, very general in Mexico, as several cities paid tribute in that produce, and the fruit passed current as the coin of the kingdom.

The well known drug of the apothecaries' shops, jalap (the convolvulus jalapa), is the produce of the temperate region, principally in the neighbourhood of Xalappa; and hence its appellation, for the J and the X in the Spanish language are *idem sonans* and interchangeable. From 200,000 to 300,000 pounds are annually exported to Europe. Yet although this drug has been so long known, it was only of late that the genus of the plant to which it belongs was ascertained.

Excellent tobacco is produced in many parts of Mexico, and it was used in the form of segars in such quantities as to yield, in the time of the Spaniards, a net revenue of £833,400; but, since the

independence of the country has been declared and the restrictions on its growth have been removed, the revenues arising from it have been lost to the state, whilst the people have been little benefited, as the price of segars remains nearly the same.

The best known indigo is raised at Guatamala. It is also found in various parts of New Spain, but is much neglected.

Vanilla, the highly prized odoriferous pod, is obtained in the forests of Oaxaca and Vera Cruz, and it is exported exclusively from the latter place to the amount of 8,000 or 10,000 pounds annually. It is not much used in the manufacture of chocolate in the country.