

At the mouth of the river Guasacualco, is the most spacious and secure harbour of any on the Atlantic coast of Mexico. It is the only port in the Mexican Gulf, where vessels of war, and others of a large size, can enter; and is far superior either to Pensacola or Espiritu Santo. There are, at all seasons, on the bar at the mouth of the port, *twenty-two feet* water; and it is said, that, during the flood of the river, the bar occasionally shifts, and affords passages in *five and six fathoms* water. Some years ago, a Spanish ship of the line, called the *Asia*, crossed the bar of Guasacualco, and anchored in the port. We have heard of some ports to the northward of Vera Cruz, capable of admitting vessels of a large size; of these, *Matagorda* has been stated to have *twenty feet* water on the bar at the mouth of the harbour: it is in latitude $28^{\circ} 30'$, about half-way between the rivers Sabine and Del Norte. But from recent information which we have obtained from the officers of the United States' navy, who have been cruising in that vicinity, we are induced to believe that there is not a single safe port in the whole range of the coast in the Gulf, with the exception of *Guasacualco*. Vera Cruz is little more than an open roadstead; and, during the northern gales, vessels are frequently driven

ashore in that port. Ships of war, and other large vessels, are moored by cables made fast to rings in the walls of the castle of San Juan de Ulua, situated on a small island in the centre of the harbour; but, during heavy gales, they are even here exposed to the danger of foundering.

The river *Guasacualco* is navigable, for vessels of the largest size, to within *twelve leagues* of the navigable waters of *Chimalapa* and *Tehuantepec*. The latter river admits from the Pacific Ocean, vessels drawing twenty feet water. It was on this river that the celebrated Cortez constructed ships, when he sent Pedro de Alvarado to conquer Guatimala. No doubt therefore exists, that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec can be entered on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, by the rivers before mentioned, and that a *good carriage road* might be made, of from *twelve to fourteen leagues*, along the sides of the mountains, by which all species of merchandise could be transported with ease, *in a few hours*, from the navigable waters of *Chimalapa* and *Tehuantepec*, to those of *Guasacualco*.

There is no part of New Spain where such a road could be made with so much facility; and indeed, if on a topographical survey of the

Isthmus, it shall be found practicable to cut a canal, there is no place where such an undertaking could be accomplished with such ease as in the province of Oaxaca.

It is proper that we should here present the reader with a brief description of this intendancy, in order to give him some idea of its present and probable future importance.

The intendancy of Oaxaca is bounded on the north and north-east by that of Vera Cruz, by the captaincy-general of Guatemala on the south-east, by the intendancy of La Puebla on the west and north-west, and by the Pacific Ocean on the south. In its boundaries are comprehended a great part of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, as before described. It is about one hundred and twenty-five leagues in length, from east to west, and its greatest breadth about ninety leagues. Notwithstanding the contracted limits of this province, and although not one-eighth of it is yet cultivated, it has a population, in proportion to its surface, far greater than any other province in New Spain. According to a census taken in 1808, it contained *six hundred thousand* inhabitants. The number of cities, towns, and villages, exceeds *eight hundred*. We have visited several villages, containing six and seven thousand inhabitants.

The city of Oaxaca (or Antequera) contains about thirty-eight thousand inhabitants; and, as we have observed in a former chapter, this city equals, if it does not surpass, the capital of the Mexican kingdom, in its beautiful streets and squares, as well as in the splendour of its edifices. Its salubrity is unequalled on the American continent; even its shores on the Pacific Ocean appear exempted from the usual diseases which afflict the inhabitants of the Atlantic and South-Sea coasts.

The population of *Tehuantepec*, which is situated on the river, only *six leagues* from the ocean, and about the latitude of $16^{\circ} 30'$, are among the most active and healthy race of Indians we have ever seen. The Indian females of Tehuantepec may be properly called the Circassians of Southern America. Their piercing eyes give to their countenance an extraordinary animation; their long black hair is neatly plaited, and adorned with combs, made of gold or tortoise-shell; while the celerity and grace of their movements strike a stranger with astonishment. They are very industrious, and manufacture nearly all their own clothing. They are remarkable for their cleanliness, and are fond of bathing. The Spanish government, during the present revolution, have looked upon

these Indians with a jealous eye, in consequence of their known predilection for the insurgents. The vicinity of the town to the sea-coast, and its being situated on a navigable river, are circumstances that give the government much uneasiness, because they are aware, that if a foreign enemy should land on the coast of Oaxaca, they would be received with open arms by the Indians of Tehuantepec, and, indeed, by the greater part of the population of the whole province, as we have suggested in a former part of this volume. The intendency of Oaxaca, therefore, not only at present possesses an immense population, but is of the highest importance for its valuable productions. It is the region of New Spain that appears the most favourable to the production of the important article of cochineal. In no other part of Mexico does the *nopal* (on which tree the cochineal insect subsists) flourish so well. Its propagation has been unsuccessfully attempted in various other provinces; but not only do the climate and soil appear peculiarly adapted to this plant in Oaxaca, but the Indians have, by a long course of practice, acquired so much experience in the manner of cultivating the *nopal*, and collecting the insects, as to preclude all rivalry in any of the other provinces. In

some years there have been produced, in Oaxaca, four hundred thousand pounds weight of cochineal: this is worth in Europe, even during peace, about one million six hundred thousand dollars. During war, it has frequently sold in England at twenty-five shillings sterling per pound. The poor Indian who collects this precious commodity, barter it for manufactured goods to the Spanish shop-keepers in the villages. The extortion of these men, together with the exactions of the government and priesthood, leave to the Indian a miserable return for his care and industry; but we have no doubt, that if these unjust and unnatural restrictions on the labour of the natives were removed, the intendency of Oaxaca would, in a very few years, produce above a million of pounds of cochineal per annum.

The mountains of this intendency, particularly those of the Misteca, are likewise peculiarly adapted to the growth of the mulberry tree. Many years ago, the experiment was made, and it succeeded so well, that it awakened the jealousy of the European Spaniards; and they created so many obstacles to the manufacturing of silk in Oaxaca, that the Indians became exasperated, and *in one night* destroyed every mulberry tree in the intendency; since

which time no attempts have been made to renew its culture.

The indigo, of the district of Tehuantepec, is superior in quality to that of Guatemala; but as there are no ports open to foreign commerce along the coast of the Pacific Ocean, in the vicinity of Tehuantepec, nor, indeed, on any part of the coast of Oaxaca, the inhabitants have not been stimulated either to the culture of that, or of the cotton plant, or of the sugar cane, except so far as is absolutely necessary to supply their own immediate consumption.

In all the mountainous districts of Oaxaca, and more especially in the spacious valleys which are situated from twenty-five hundred to six thousand feet above the level of the sea, we find a soil and climate at least equal, if not superior, to any on the globe. There is not a single article raised in the temperate zone, that would not here find a congenial region. Wheat, and all kinds of grain, yield a return to the cultivator equal to that of the most fertile parts of Europe. The fruits and vegetables of Oaxaca are unrivalled for luxuriance and delicacy. Peaches, pears, apricots, and strawberries, are here to be found of a size and flavour superior to those of the south of France; and the variety and excellence of the grape

point out the valleys of Oaxaca as the great future vineyards of New Spain. Asparagus, artichokes, turnips, cabbages, and all the various productions of horticulture, grow to a size and perfection we have never beheld elsewhere.

To all these important natural advantages of this favoured country, must be added that of its mineral productions. Some of the most valuable gold mines of New Spain are in this province; but they have not yet been extensively worked, inasmuch as the attention of the directors of the mining establishments in Mexico has been principally directed to the mines of Guanajuato, and of other provinces, silver mines being considered more profitable than those of gold. The Indians of the Upper and Lower Misteca, as well as those of the district of Tehuantepec, collect grains of gold in the beds of the rivulets that flow through the mountains; and larger masses of gold have been found in Oaxaca, than in any other part of New Spain. Indications of silver ore are, likewise, discoverable in all the mountainous districts; but as yet scarcely any attention has been paid to them. In fact, there cannot be a doubt that this province abounds in all the precious minerals; and when the use of machinery shall be introduced, and the restrictions

on human industry and enterprise be removed, this province will yield as much gold and silver as any other in America. It is worthy of remark, likewise, that copper and iron ore have been found in different parts of Oaxaca. In the village of *Yanhuitlan*, there is a large piece of metal, which the blacksmiths of the place use as an anvil. It was found on the summit of a hill near the village, and is of an extraordinary weight for its dimensions. Various attempts have been made to fuse it, but it has resisted the most intense heat.*

From the preceding outline of the great resources of this province, including its dense population, it will be evident to the reader, that to make a carriage road of fourteen, or even (should it be necessary) of twenty leagues, over the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, so as to form

* We feel great hesitation in adding, that this mass of metal is *platina*, although it is so named in some manuscript notes upon the intendancy of Oaxaca, at present in our possession, by Teran and Bustamante, names with which our readers are familiar. Beside their being men of general information, it may not be improper to add, that Bustamante was at one time connected with the School of Mines in Mexico. We at least learn, from their so terming it, that it is a very general belief that the mass is *platina*. The mineralogists will, of course, immediately pronounce it to be impossible,—and we are content.

a rapid communication from the navigable waters of the Chimalapa and Tehuantepec to the Guasacualco, or to cut a canal through such parts of the Isthmus as an accurate survey shall shew to be fittest for the purpose, are operations which could be performed with the greatest facility by the inhabitants of Oaxaca.

The idea of such an undertaking has long been familiar to several enlightened men of Oaxaca. So early as the year 1745, a memorial was presented to the viceroy of Mexico, signed by several distinguished Creoles, praying him to represent to the court of Spain the immense benefits that would arise to the kingdom, from making Guasacualco a port of entry, and the great depôt of commerce, instead of the port and city of Vera Cruz. A copy of this interesting document was put into our hands, while in the city of Oaxaca, in the year 1816, and we were forcibly struck with the importance of the facts noticed therein. It displays an intelligence, a foresight, and a spirit of liberality, such as could scarcely have been expected, in those days, from men reared in that political and commercial darkness in which Spain enveloped her dominions. After giving a topographical description of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and expatiating on the fertility

and beauty of the country, the memorialists explicitly declare, that a canal can be cut, so as to unite the waters of the rivers before mentioned; and they likewise state, that should political reasons prevent the formation of the proposed canal, at all events a great road might be made across the ridge, by means of which property could be transported in carriages at a moderate expense. The memorialists then proceed to unfold the great advantages that would result to the kingdom of Mexico, by opening a traffic between Manilla and the coast of Oaxaca, instead of the trade being restricted (as it still is) to the port of Acapulco. The superior advantages of the port and harbour of Guasacualco over that of Vera Cruz, and the number of valuable ports on the coast of Oaxaca, are then noticed; and, of the latter, they particularly mention *Tehuantepec*, *San Diego*, *Santa Cruz de Guatulco*, *Cacalutla*, *San Augustin*, *Puerto de los Angeles*, *Escondido* (hidden port), and the ensanada or bay of *Mazuntla*. The port of *Escondido* has a narrow, but excellent entrance, which is only discovered on a very near approach to the coast; but it is as spacious as Acapulco, and would afford perfectly secure moorings for hundreds of vessels. It could easily be fortified

so as to render it impregnable to external attacks. The port of Santa Cruz de Guatulco is, likewise, equal to any on the Pacific shore, and is situated only thirty-five leagues south of the city of Oaxaca.

The whole of the Memoir alluded to is full of interesting information and luminous argument, and would have excited the profound attention of any other government than that of Spain. The merchants of Vera Cruz no sooner heard of the Memorial, than they adopted every possible measure to prevent its even reaching Madrid; but, nevertheless, it was transmitted to the court. The Cadiz monopolists, and the Philippine company, viewed with great alarm a project that threatened to divert the trade out of its ordinary channels. The mercantile establishments they had already fixed at Acapulco and Vera Cruz, and the expensive edifices they had erected at those places, would become valueless in proportion as this should be effected. These parties, therefore, and their agents in Vera Cruz and Acapulco, put in action every engine of intrigue, in order to defeat the wishes of the Oaxaca memorialists. The Memorial was placed among the secret royal archives at Madrid, that is, it was laid on the shelf of oblivion; and the

only notice that was ever bestowed on it, was by an order from the court, *prohibiting the parties from ever again reviving the subject, under pain of the royal displeasure*; and severely reprimanding, or stigmatizing, the Oaxaca memorialists, as *audacious innovators of the established regulations and commerce of the kingdom*.

The only viceroys who have displayed liberal sentiments, or shewn the least regard for the internal improvement of New Spain, and the establishment, on liberal principles, of the internal and external commerce of the country, were the Count of *Revillagigedo* and *Don José Iturrigaray*. Both of those viceroys were men of enlarged minds, who viewed with disgust the unnatural and impolitic regulations imposed by Spain upon her colonies. During their administration, they made some important improvements in Mexico. The formation of a canal to unite the waters of Guasacualco with those of Chimalapa and Tehuantepec, was a favourite project with both; and, convinced of its practicability, they made urgent representations to the court of Madrid, to induce it to sanction the undertaking. Their applications were of no avail; and, in the end, they both incurred the displeasure of the cabinet

of Madrid. The character and fate of the noble-minded Iturrigaray have been noticed in our first chapter of the Memoirs of the Revolution.

Having shewn the practicability and facility of opening a communication, either by a navigable canal or by a land and water conveyance, at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, we will now proceed to draw an outline of the great advantages to the commercial world in general, and particularly to the inhabitants of *Mexico, Guatemala*, and the *United States*, that will flow from such a communication. It is necessary to remark, that the following observations are founded upon our conviction, that New Spain will become independent of European control. At what period this great event will be accomplished, we will not venture to predict; but we may express a belief, that it will take place in a very few years.

In viewing the map of the American continent, we perceive that the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the Isthmus of Costa Rica, are the two great points at which to concentrate the commerce of the New World, and to facilitate the intercourse between it and the Old World. It is immaterial at which of those two points