

situated at the extremity of Cape Araya, were worked in very remote times. The Spaniards, who settled at first at Cubagua, and soon after on the coasts of Cumana, worked, from the beginning of the sixteenth century, the salt marshes which stretch away like a lagoon to the north of Cerro de la Vela. As at that period the peninsula of Araya had no settled population, the Dutch availed themselves of the natural riches of a soil which appeared to be property common to all nations. In our days, each colony has its own salt-works, and navigation is so much improved, that the merchants of Cadiz can send, at a small expense, salt from Spain and Portugal to the southern hemisphere, a distance of 1900 leagues, to cure meat at Monte Video and Buenos Ayres. These advantages were unknown at the time of the conquest; colonial industry had then made so little progress, that the salt of Araya was carried, at great expense, to the West India Islands, Carthagena, and Portobello. In 1605, the court of Madrid sent armed ships to Punta Araya, with orders to expel the Dutch by force of arms. The Dutch, however, continued to carry on a contraband trade in salt till, in 1622, there was built near the salt-works a fort, which afterwards became celebrated under the name of the Castillo de Santiago, or the Real Fuerza de Araya. The great salt-marshes are laid down on the oldest Spanish maps, sometimes as a bay, and at other times as a lagoon. Laet, who wrote his *Orbis Novus* in 1633, and who had some excellent notions respecting these coasts, expressly states, that the lagoon was separated from the sea by an isthmus above the level of high water. In 1726, an impetuous hurricane destroyed the salt-works of Araya, and rendered the fort, the construction of which had cost more than a million of piastres, useless. This hurricane was a very rare phenomenon in these regions, where the sea is in general as calm as the water in our large rivers. The waves overflowed the land to a great extent; and by the effect of this eruption of the ocean the salt lake was converted into a gulf several miles in length. Since that period, artificial reservoirs, or pits, (*vasets*,) have been formed, to the north of the range of hills which separates the castle from the north coast of the peninsula.