

their pleasure, and sold it, paying the government the moderate sum of three hundred piastres. The price of the fanega was then four reals;* but the salt was extremely impure, grey, mixed with earthy particles, and surcharged with muriate and sulphate of magnesia. Since the province of Cumana has become dependent on the intendancia of Caracas, the sale of salt is under the control of the excise; and the fanega, which the Guayquerias sold at half a piastre, costs a piastre and a half.† This augmentation of price is slightly compensated by greater purity of the salt, and by the facility with which the fishermen and farmers can procure it in abundance during the whole year. The salt-works of Araya yielded to the treasury, in 1799, a clear income of eight thousand piastres.

Considered as a branch of industry the salt produced here is not of any great importance, but the nature of the soil which contains the salt-marshes is well worthy of attention. In order to obtain a clear idea of the geological connection existing between this muriatiferous soil and the rocks of more ancient formation, we shall take a general view of the neighbouring mountains of Cumana, and those of the peninsula of Araya, and the island of Margareta.

Three great parallel chains extend from east to west. The two most northerly chains are primitive, and contain the mica-slates of Macanao, and the San Juan Valley, of Maniquarez, and of Chuparipari. These we shall distinguish by the names of Cordillera of the island of Margareta, and Cordillera of Araya. The third chain, the most southerly of the whole, the Cordillera of the Brigantine and of the Cocollar, contains rocks only of secondary formation; and, what is remarkable enough, though analogous to the geological constitution of the Alps westward of St. Gothard, the primitive chain is much less elevated than that which was composed of

* In this narrative, as well as in the Political Essay on New Spain, all the prices are reckoned in piastres, and silver reals (reales de plata). Eight of these reals are equivalent to a piastre, or one hundred and five sous, French money (4s. 4½d. English). *Nouv. Esp.*, vol. ii., p. 519, 616, and 866.

† The fanega of salt is sold to those Indians and fishermen who do not pay the duties (derechos reales), at Punta Araya for six, at Cumana for eight reals. The prices to the other tribes are, at Araya ten, at Cumana twelve reals.