

abundant nourishment within a narrow space, covered with plantains, cassava, yams, and maize. The isolated situation of the huts dispersed through the forest indicates to the traveller the fecundity of nature, where a small spot of cultivated land suffices for the wants of several families.

These considerations on the agriculture of the torrid zone involuntarily remind us of the intimate connexion existing between the extent of land cleared, and the progress of society. The richness of the soil, and the vigour of organic life, by multiplying the means of subsistence, retard the progress of nations in the paths of civilization. Under so mild and uniform a climate, the only urgent want of man is that of food. This want only, excites him to labour; and we may easily conceive why, in the midst of abundance, beneath the shade of the plantain and bread-fruit tree, the intellectual faculties unfold themselves less rapidly than under a rigorous sky, in the region of corn, where our race is engaged in a perpetual struggle with the elements. In Europe we estimate the number of the inhabitants of a country by the extent of cultivation: within the tropics, on the contrary, in the warmest and most humid parts of South America, very populous provinces appear almost deserted; because man, to find nourishment, cultivates but a small number of acres. These circumstances modify the physical appearance of the country and the character of its inhabitants, giving to both a peculiar physiognomy; the wild and uncultivated stamp which belongs to nature, ere its primitive type has been altered by art. Without neighbours, almost unconnected with the rest of mankind, each family of settlers forms a separate tribe. This insulated state arrests or retards the progress of civilization, which advances only in proportion as society becomes numerous, and its connexions more intimate and multiplied. But, on the other hand, it is solitude that develops and strengthens in man the sentiment of liberty and independence; and gives birth to that noble pride of character which has at all times distinguished the Castilian race.

From these causes, the land in the most populous regions of equinoctial America still retains a wild aspect, which is destroyed in temperate climates by the cultivation of corn. Within the tropics the agricultural nations occupy less