

precious metal came; and though the information obtained in the province of Coro, and the markets of Curiana and Cauchieto,* clearly proved that real mineral wealth was to be found only to the west and south-west of Coro (that is to say, in the mountains near those of New Grenada), the whole province of Caracas was nevertheless eagerly explored. A governor, newly arrived on that coast, could recommend himself to the Spanish court only by boasting of the mines of his province; and in order to take from cupidity what was most ignoble and repulsive, the thirst of gold was justified by the purpose to which it was pretended the riches acquired by fraud and violence might be employed. "Gold," says Christopher Columbus, in his last letter † to King Ferdinand, "gold is a thing so much the more necessary to your majesty, because, in order to fulfil the ancient prophecy, Jerusalem is to be rebuilt by a prince of the Spanish monarchy. Gold is the most excellent of metals. What becomes of those precious stones, which are sought for at the extremities of the globe? They are sold, and are finally converted into gold. With gold we not only do whatever we please in this world, but we can even employ it to snatch souls from Purgatory, and to people Paradise." These words bear the stamp of the age in which Columbus lived; but we are surprised to see this pompous eulogium of riches written by a man whose whole life was marked by the most noble disinterestedness.

The conquest of the province of Venezuela having been begun at its western extremity, the neighbouring mountains of Coro, Tocuyo, and Barquisimeto, first attracted the at-

* The Spaniards found, in 1500, in the country of Curiana (now Coro), little birds, frogs, and other ornaments made of gold. Those who had cast these figures lived at Cauchieto, a place nearer the Rio de la Hacha. I have seen ornaments resembling those described by Peter Martyr of Anghiera (which indicate tolerable skill in goldsmiths' work), among the remains of the ancient inhabitants of Cundinamarca. The same art appears to have been practised in places along the coasts, and also farther to the south, among the mountains of New Grenada.

† Lettera rarissima data nelle Indie nella isola di Jamaica a 7 Julio del 1503.—"Le oro è metallo sopra gli altri eccellentissimo; e dell' oro si fanno li tesori e chi lo tiene fa e opera quanto vuole nel mondo, e finalmente aggonne a mandare le anime al Paradiso."