

branches and leaves, draw a great part of their nourishment from the ambient air; and the virgin soil augments its fertility by the decomposition of the vegetable substances which progressively accumulate. It is not so in the fields covered with indigo, or other herbaceous plants; where the rays of the sun penetrate freely into the earth, and by the accelerated combustion of the hydrurets of carbon and other acidifiable principles, destroy the germs of fecundity. These effects strike the imagination of the planters the more forcibly, as in lands newly inhabited they compare the fertility of a soil which has been abandoned to itself during thousands of years, with the produce of ploughed fields. The Spanish colonies on the continent, and the great islands of Porto-Rico and Cuba, possess remarkable advantages with respect to the produce of agriculture over the lesser West India Islands. The former, from their extent, the variety of their scenery, and their small relative population, still bear all the characters of a new soil; while at Barbadoes, Tobago, St. Lucia, the Virgin Islands, and the French part of St. Domingo, it may be perceived that long cultivation has begun to exhaust the soil. If in the valleys of Aragua, instead of abandoning the indigo grounds, and leaving them fallow, they were covered during several years, not with corn, but with other alimentary plants and forage; if among these plants such as belong to different families were preferred, and which shade the soil by their large leaves, the amelioration of the fields would be gradually accomplished, and they would be restored to a part of their former fertility.

The city of Nueva Valencia occupies a considerable extent of ground, but its population scarcely amounts to six or seven thousand souls. The streets are very broad, the market place, (plaza mayor,) is of vast dimensions; and, the houses being low, the disproportion between the population of the town, and the space that it occupies, is still greater than at Caracas. Many of the whites, (especially the poorest,) forsake their houses, and live the greater part of the year in their little plantations of indigo and cotton, where they can venture to work with their own hands; which, according to the inveterate prejudices of that country, would be a disgrace to them in the town.