

Caracas, amounts to four million eight hundred thousand piastres. So important an object of commerce merits a careful discussion; and I flatter myself, that, from the great number of materials I have collected on all the branches of colonial agriculture, I shall be able to add something to the information published by M. Depons, in his valuable work on the provinces of Venezuela.

The tree which produces the cacao is not at present found wild in the forests of Terra Firma to the north of the Orinoco; we began to find it only beyond the cataracts of Ature and Maypure. It abounds particularly near the banks of the Ventuari, and on the Upper Orinoco, between the Padamo and the Gehette. This scarcity of wild cacao-trees in South America, north of the latitude of 6°, is a very curious phenomenon of botanical geography, and yet little known. This phenomenon appears the more surprising, as, according to the annual produce of the harvest, the number of trees in full bearing in the cacao-plantations of Caracas, Nueva Barcelona, Venezuela, Varinas, and Maracaybo, is estimated at more than sixteen millions. The wild cacao-tree has many branches, and is covered with a tufted and dark foliage. It bears a very small fruit, like that variety which the ancient Mexicans called *tlalcacahuatl*. Transplanted into the conucos of the Indians of Cassiquiare and the Rio Negro, the wild tree preserves for several generations that force of vegetable life, which makes it bear fruit in the fourth year; while, in the province of Caracas, the harvest begins only the sixth, seventh, or eighth year. It is later in the inland parts than on the coasts and in the valley of Guapo. We met with no tribe on the Orinoco that prepared a beverage with the seeds of the cacao-tree. The savages suck the pulp of the pod, and throw away the seeds, which are often found in heaps where they have passed the night. Though *chorote*, which is a very weak infusion of cacao, is considered on the coast to be a very ancient beverage, no historical fact proves that chocolate, or any preparation whatever of cacao, was known to the natives of Venezuela before the arrival of the Spaniards. It appears to me more probable that the cacao-plantations of Caracas were suggested by those of Mexico and Guatimala; and that the Spaniards inhabiting Terra Firma learned the