

cultivation of the cacao-tree, sheltered in its youth by the foliage of the erythrina and plantain;\* the fabrication of cakes of *chocolatl*, and the use of the liquid of the same name, in course of their communications with Mexico, Guatimala, and Nicaragua.

Down to the sixteenth century travellers differed in opinion respecting the *chocolatl*. Benzoni plainly says that it is a drink "fitter for hogs than men."† The Jesuit Acosta asserts, that "the Spaniards who inhabit America are fond of chocolate to excess; but that it requires to be accustomed to that black beverage not to be disgusted at the mere sight of its froth, which swims on it like yeast on a fermented liquor." He adds, "the cacao is a prejudice (una supersticion) of the Mexicans, as the coca is a prejudice of the Peruvians." These opinions remind us of Madame de Sevigné's prediction respecting the use of coffee. Fernando Cortez and his page, the *gentilhombre del gran Conquistador*, whose memoirs were published by Ramusio, on the contrary, highly praise chocolate, not only as an agreeable drink, though prepared cold,‡ but in particular as a nutritious substance. "He who has drunk one cup," says the page of Fernando Cortez, "can travel a whole day without any other food, especially in very hot climates; for chocolate is by its nature cold and refreshing." We shall not subscribe to the latter part of this assertion; but we shall soon have occasion, in our voyage on the Orinoco, and our excursions towards the summit of the Cordilleras, to celebrate the salutary properties of chocolate. It is easily conveyed and readily employed: as an aliment it contains a large quantity of nutritive and stimulating particles in a small compass. It has been said with truth, that in the East, rice, gum, and ghee (clarified butter), assist man in crossing the deserts; and so, in the New World, cho-

\* This process of the Mexican cultivators, practised on the coast of Caracas, is described in the memoirs known under the title of "Relazione di certo Gentiluomo del Signor Cortez, Conquistadore del Messico." (Ramusio, tom. ii, p. 134).

† Benzoni, Istoria del Mondo Nuovo, 1572, p. 104.

‡ Father Gili has very clearly shown, from two passages in Torquemada (Monarquia Indiana, lib. xiv.) that the Mexicans prepared the infusion cold, and that the Spaniards introduced the custom of preparing chocolate by boiling water with the paste of cacao.