

The gold-washings of the Rio Sinu, heretofore so important, above all, between its source and the village of San Geronimo, have almost entirely ceased, as well as those of Cienega de Tolu, Uraba, and all the rivers descending from the mountains of Abibé. "The Darien and the Zenu," says the bachelor Enciso, in his geographical work, published at the beginning of the sixteenth century, "is a country so rich in gold pepites, that, in the running waters, that metal can be fished with nets." Excited by these narratives, the governor Pedrarias sent his lieutenant, Francisco Becerra, in 1515, to the Rio Sinu. This expedition was most unfortunate, for Becerra and his troop were massacred by the natives, of whom the Spaniards, according to the custom of the time, had carried away great numbers to be sold as slaves in the West Indies. The province of Antioquia now furnishes, in its auriferous veins, a vast field for mining speculations; but it might be well worth while to relinquish gold-washings for the cultivation of colonial productions, in the fertile lands of Sinu, the Rio Damaquiel, the Uraba, and the Darien del Norte; above all, that of cacao, which is of a superior quality. The proximity of the port of Carthagena would also render the neglected cultivation of cinchona an object of great importance to European trade. That precious tree vegetates at the source of the Rio Sinu, as in the mountains of Abibé and Maria. The real febrifuge cinchona, with a hairy corolla, is nowhere else found so near the coast, if we except the Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta.

The Rio Sinu and the Gulf of Darien were not visited by Columbus. The most eastern point at which that great man touched land, on the 26th November, 1503, is the Puerto de Retreto, now called Punta de Escribanos, near the Punta of San Blas, in the isthmus of Panama. Two years previously, Rodrigo de Bastidas and Alonso de Ojeda, accompanied by Amerigo Vespucci, had discovered the whole coast of the main land, from the Gulf of Maracaybo as far as the Puerto de Retreto. Having often had occasion in the preceding volumes to speak of New Andalusia, I may here mention that I found that denomination, for the first time, in the convention made by Alonso de Ojeda with the Conquistador Diego de Sicuessa, a powerful man, say the historians of his time, "because he was a flattering courtier and a wit."