

Venezuela's Commercial and Economic Conditions.

The special correspondent of the London Times at Caracas, writing on December 21, said: "Commercial interests in Venezuela are suffering from the by no means uncommon, but none the less unpleasant, experience of reaction after a period of undue inflation, this latter resulting from large amounts of foreign capital being drawn into the country for the construction of railways and other public works, the bait held out was the one well-known to European investors—a government guarantee of a certain rate of interest, in this case 7 per cent. being agreed upon. The total value of the capital so obtained and invested in Venezuela during the eleven years from 1883 to 1891 is stated to exceed £11,000,000 sterling.

"Commercial business is, however, on a fairly sound footing in Venezuela. The currency is on a sound basis, gold coin being the standard of the country, and the two principal banks being managed on sound business lines, and are in a perfectly solvent condition. The very high rate of interest undoubtedly checks the progress of the country, and the only plausible explanation is the constant fear of revolution and the want of confidence in the administration.

"As regards the trade of Venezuela with the outside world, the value of English goods is greater than that from any other country. Next comes that of the United States, then Germany, France and Spain in the order named. England supplies cottons, woollens and general merchandise; the United States breadstuffs, oils and provisions; Germany cutlery and general merchandise; France silks and fancy goods, Spain and Cuba wines and tobacco. As traders throughout Venezuela, the Germans are certainly first in importance and numbers.

"The value of the produce exported shows the balance of trade to be slightly in favor of Venezuela. The following is an approximate list of the exports in 1891 and values at the port of shipment:

Product.	Amount.	Value.
Coffee, tons.....	46,000	£3,680,000
Cocoa, tons.....	7,000	60,000
Hides, tons.....	170,000	90,000
Gold, ounces.....	50,000	180,000
Other products.....	100,000
Total.....	£4,110,000

"The economic condition of Venezuela is less happy than the commercial. Men with no knowledge of government obtain control of all political offices, and the country suffers from their ignorance and propensity to make use of power for their personal advantage. The better class of Venezuelans hold aloof from political life, asserting that to enter politics at once throws upon them the suspicion of doubtful morality, and possibly deserve the reproof administered by Plato when he says that the fate of people who refuse to take part in the government of their country is to be governed by worse men than themselves.

"In 1881 the population of Venezuela was stated to be 2,075,245; in 1891, 2,323,527, of whom 826,000 were of pure Indian blood; these Indians again were classified as 66,000 independent, 20,000 conquered and 240,000 civilized. In the principal cities and towns some attempt is made to educate the poorer classes, but this is only supported by the authorities in a most half-hearted manner. In the country districts the educational question is entirely neglected. Even amongst the Venezuelans who have been educated in Europe there is no idea of the necessity for the education of the peasant classes.

"Another fact militating against rapid economic development in Venezuela is the gregarious nature of the Venezuelans. Their habit is to flock into the cities and towns

rather than to devote themselves to the cultivation of coffee or cocoa estates or agricultural pursuits. Life in the cities has, to some extent, added a surface veneer to the raw material, but little beyond this. Among the Venezuelans I do not find that steadfastness of purpose which is so marked a feature with the Chileans, nor is there that polish of manner so frequently met with in Argentina. As to the possibility of Venezuela in the future producing men capable of administering the affairs of the country in an effective and strong manner, I can only quote the opinion of a well-informed Venezuelan on the matter. His words were: 'Venezuela must come under the immediate influence of the United States or some other strong nation, for the reason that no satisfactory administration will be obtained by herself. I have watched government after government for forty years past, and the class of men you see at the head of affairs now is typical of what has gone before and what may be expected in the future.'

"Coffee is the main staple of Venezuelan wealth, but many drawbacks exist to deter Europeans from embarking in the enterprise. A revolution breaks out, and male laborers are requisitioned to serve as soldiers on one side or the other.

"All these dangers are equally present to the growth of cocoa, and, indeed, to any undertaking necessitating the employment of large numbers of laborers. The sugar industry only survives in Venezuela owing to the fact that the importation of foreign sugars is absolutely prohibited. The result of the extreme form of protection is that a pound of coarse brown sugar costs from 8d. to 10d. Of other branches of agriculture the most important are the cultivation of Indian corn, beans, and the ordinary tropical fruits and vegetables for local consumption. The number of cattle in the country is estimated at between 4,000,000 and 5,000,000; they are mostly long horned, small-bodied animals of no great value except for their hides.

"The mining industry shows a very great falling off. In 1890 the value of gold exported was £349,230, as compared to £180,000 in 1891; in 1890 the copper ores shipped were worth £97,990, while in 1891 no copper was exported. Gold is found chiefly to the south of the Orinoco and in the Andine states, in the western section of Venezuela. In the former district is the once famous Callao mine, which paid fabulous dividends for a time. Most of the gold is alluvial, and is, as a rule, 'pockety' so far as experience has yet gone. It is known, however, that payable quartz exists, as in the case of the Collao, in several districts, and only requires cheaper transport to allow of working at a profit. The principal copper mine was situated not far from Puerto Cabello, but the mineral completely gave out after some years of working. Coal is found near Barcelona, but as yet its exploration has not proved profitable.

"An approximate estimate of the number of laborers employed in the industries which I have mentioned is as follows:

Industry.	Average daily wage	Number employed.	Total yearly earnings 365 days.
Coffee, cocoa and sugar plantations....	3s.	41,000	£1,845,000
Gold mining....	6s.	1,500	135,000
Cattle ranches	£2 10s per month and food	8,000	240,000
Other farming..	3s.	10,000	450,000
Total.		60,500	£2,670,000

"At first sight the rate of wages may appear high to Europeans, but when the cost of living is considered the value earned is by no means too great. The necessities of life are costly to purchase on account of the high protective tariff, the duty on flour being over 10s. per 100 pounds for the ordinary and additional custom house charges.

"One great hinderance to the speedy settlement and development of Venezuela lies in the physical features of the country. The great mountain ranges, beginning close to the seashore and extending some hundreds of miles inland, makes all transport a long and tedious matter, and to overcome those difficulties by extending the existing railway system is beyond the present means of Venezuela. To-day the patient and hardy donkey is the sole medium of carrying merchandise from the fringe of the coast-line tapped by the railways to supply the needs of the inhabitants in the far interior.

"In all there are eleven separate railway companies, six of these being English, three native, one German and one French. In most cases the government subscribes a portion of the capital for construction, and to seven of the companies further guaranteed 7 per cent annually on a capital not to exceed £10,000 per mile of railway built. This guarantee interest is now a bone of contention between the government and the companies, the former alleging the inability of the country to meet such heavy obligations, and the latter being unable to pay dividends to their shareholders unless the government fulfills the terms of its contract.

"Until the management of the country is in the hands of more responsible administrators than those who directed the destinies of Venezuela for the past decade there can be slight hope of any progress."

Handling Furs.

Jas. McMillan & Co., give the following instructions for handling furs: Fisher, foxes, lynx, marten, mink, opossum, otter and skunk, must be "cased," that is not cut open. In skinning out at the rump and turn the skin inside out (like a glove) over the body of the animal, leaving the pelt inside out.

Scrape clean, put a thin board inside the skin, cut the natural shape of it, stretching the skin to its fullest extent, but not so much as to make the fur thin. Too much stretching spreads the fur over a large surface and makes it thin and lacking in richness. Remove board when partly dry. Never use bent sticks, bows or anything in shape that yields.

Musk rats must be "cased," but with fur side in. Chop off the tails. Skin at the tail, and make rumps square. Muskrat skinned from the nose, rumps rounded with a bow, have less value and do not sell well. Muskrats must not be injured by shooting or spearing; trap them.

Badger, bear, beaver, cats, raccoon, wolves, and wolverine should be "open," that is, out open, up the belly from the rump to the head. After scraping cleaning and drying, stretch a uniformly oblong shape, but not so much as to make the fur thin. When thoroughly dry trim off legs, shanks, flippers, and any little pieces that spoil appearance of the skin.

Beaver are sometimes stretched almost round, but appear very much better stretched oblong. Value by the skin, never by the pound. They rapidly loose in weight. They bring most sold by the skin.

Trap furs. Spearing tears the pelt and shaves off the fur. Both do serious injury and lessen the selling price.

Do not cure with alum or salt. It injurs them for dressing and spoils their sale. Do not dry skins at a fire or in the sun, or in smoke. It often "burns" them and makes them more liable to spoil or ruin on being dressed. Dry in the open air where shady. Meaty skins often "burn." The meat and fat on them heats and "burns" them, and they then go to pieces and rot on being dressed. Too much warmth curls and spoils the top fur or hair. Never stuff furs of any kind; dry and stretch as explained. Do not stretch out the nose and make it pointed. It gives a south-