

quality, and worth very little. I had reason, however, to suspect that the best pearls had been previously picked out, and that the refuse were offered to me in the hope that I did not understand the articles, and might be induced to purchase from the low price."

Several very rich gold mines exist at Cuesta de Jocote, but they do not appear to be worked to much advantage.

Punta Arenas, the chief port of the thriving State of Costa Rica, possesses a rapidly increasing commerce. In 1845, the exports of coffee were about 50,000 quintals, and in three years more they are expected to reach 100,000, and the imports will of course be in proportion.

Coffee Culture.

"The cultivation of coffee forms the present riches of Costa Rica, and has raised it to a state of prosperity unknown in any other part of Central America. It was begun about twelve years ago, a few plants having been brought from New Granada; and the first trial being successful, it has rapidly extended. All the coffee is grown in the plain of San José, where, as already observed, the three principal towns are situated—about two-thirds being produced in the environs of the capital, a fourth in those of Heredia, and the remainder at Alhajuelah and its vicinity. The land which has been found, by experience, to be best suited to coffee is a black loam, and the next best a dark red earth—soils of a brown and dull yellow colour being quite unsuitable. The plain of San José is mostly of the first class, being, like all the soils of Central America, formed with a large admixture of volcanic materials. Contrary to the experience of Java and Arabia Felix, coffee is here found to thrive much better, and produce a more healthy and equal berry, on plain land, than upon hills or undulating slopes, which, doubtless, arises from the former retaining its moisture better, and generally containing a larger deposit of loam.

"I am inclined in a great measure to attribute the practice of sowing coffee in sloping land in Java to the fact that the plains are generally occupied by the more profitable cultivation of sugar-cane. In Arabia the plains are generally of a sandy nature (being lands which have, apparently, at no very distant geological period formed the bed of the sea), which may account for the plantations existing only upon the low hills and slopes.

"A coffee plantation in Costa Rica produces a crop the third year after it is planted, and is in perfection the fifth year. The coffee trees are planted in rows, with a space of about three yards between each and one between each plant, resembling in appearance hedges of the laurel bay. The weeds are cut down and the earth slightly turned with a hoe, three or four times in the year; and the plant is not allowed to increase above the height of six feet for the facility of gathering the fruit. The coffee tree here begins to flower in the months of March and April, and the berry ripens in the plain of San José in the months of November and December, strongly resembling a wild cherry in form and appearance, being covered with a similar sweet pulp.

"As soon as the crimson colour assumed by the ripe fruit indicates the time for cropping, numbers of men, women, and children, are sent to gather the berry, which is piled in large heaps to soften the pulp for 48 hours, and then placed in tanks through which a stream of water passes, where it is continually stirred to free it from the outer pulp; after which it is spread out upon a platform, with which every coffee estate is furnished, to dry in the sun; but there still exists an inner husk, which, when perfectly dry, is, in the smaller estates, removed by treading the berry under the feet of oxen; and, in the larger, by water mills, which bruise the berry slightly to break the husk, and afterwards separate it by fanners. The entire cost of producing a quintal (101½ lbs. British) of coffee, including the keeping of the estate in order, cleaning and pruning the plants, and gathering and preparing the berries, is, at the present rate of wages (two reals, or about a shilling per day), calculated at two-and-a-half dollars (equal to ten shillings); but the labourers are now hardly sufficient for working all the estates which are planted, so that the price may probably rise a little, though the present rate of payment enables the natives to live much better than has been their wont.

"The price of coffee in San José during the months of February, March, and April, after which none can generally be met with, was, in 1846, about five dollars cash per quintal. The price of conveyance is about one dollar per quintal, the duty (which is collected for the repairs of the road) one real more, so that the speculator makes, at least, ten reals, or about 20 per cent., by purchasing and sending the coffee to the port, on his outlay and charges; but it is often bartered for manufactured goods, and is also purchased beforehand—half being paid in imports, and half in cash to the grower. The voyage from Punta Arenas to Europe is at least five months, while that from Matina, the port on the north-east coast, which is about equidistant from San José, or perhaps a