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SUGAR PRODUCING PLANTS.¹

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I have to speak of the manufacture of sugar and the plants from which it is extracted. Of all the chemical industries properly so called, this is probably the oldest, and it is now the greatest, both as regards the capital involved and the general importance to all classes of mankind. It is said that the march of civilisation in a country is marked by an increase in the consumption of sugar and of soap, and this is certainly supported by present statistics. The world seems to have got on very well with little or no sugar until the 16th century of our era, when the introduction of tea and coffee into Europe increased the demand an hundred-fold and more, and refineries were established in Holland and England.

The origin of the sugar industry is naturally shrouded in the darkness of a time very far past. We consider the word sugar to be derived from the Persian *shukkar* which, with the Arabic name of the same pronunciation, comes from the Sanskrit *sarkara*. It is, however, impossible to tell from ancient writers whether the substance frequently

¹ Sommerville Lecture delivered April, 1889.