

C H A P. II.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF AMERICA.

THIS vast track, frequently denominated the New World, extends from latitude 78 degrees north, to latitude 56 degrees south, that is 134 degrees, which, taken in a straight line, amounts to 8040 miles in length. Its breadth is various, being, in some places, 3690 miles, and in others not above 60 or 70. It forms a part of both hemispheres, and boasts all the different climates of the earth. It is bounded on the north by unknown lands, on the south by the Southern Ocean, on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by the Great Pacific Ocean. By means of these seas it carries on a direct commerce with the other three parts of the world.

America, generally considered, consists of two extensive continents, joined together by a narrow neck of land, called the Isthmus of Darien, and distinguished by the appellations of North and South. A great variety of islands are scattered on both sides of America. Several on the north-west coast were discovered by *Captain Cook*. On a large gulph, formed by the coasts of the northern and southern continents, and those of the Isthmus of Darien, lie a multitude of islands, many of them large, and most of them fertile. They are called the West Indies, and will, as well as all the rest, be described in their proper order.

Though America is not, in general, a mountainous country, it has the greatest mountains in the world. In South America the Andes run from north to south along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. They extend from the Isthmus of Darien to the Straits of Magellan, divide the southern parts of America, and run a length of between 4 and 5000 English miles. In North America are several lofty and extensive chains, the principal of which are called the Allegany or Apalachian mountains.

North America is watered by many rivers, the most remarkable of which will be described in their respective provinces. The river Mississippi, rising from unknown sources, runs a prodigious course from north to south. There are five great lakes, which, communicating with each other, afford a most advantageous inlet for commerce. Many parts are, indeed, so intersected with navigable rivers and creeks, that numbers of planters may be said to have each an harbour at his own door.

South America has three of the largest rivers in the world, the river of the Amazons, the river Plata, and the river Oroonoko.

A country of such prodigious extent as America on each side of the equator, must necessarily have a variety of soils as well as climates.

It is very remarkable that the climates of North America are colder, by many degrees, than any of the countries in the same latitude in Europe. Thus New Britain, which is nearly in the same latitude with Great Britain, is almost insufferably cold to an European. The greatest part of the frozen country of Newfoundland, the Bay of St. Laurence, and Cape Breton, lie opposite to the coast of France. Nova Scotia and New England are in the same latitude as the Bay of Biscay. New York and Pennsylvania lie opposite to Spain and Portugal. Hence the coldest winds of North America blow from the north and the west, as they do here from the north and east.

If we except the most northern and southern parts, which are naturally cold and barren, the rest produce, in abundance, most of the metals, minerals, plants, fruits, trees, and woods, to be met with in the other parts of the world, and some of them in greater quantities, and higher perfection. America also produces

diamonds, pearls, emeralds, amethysts, and other valuable stones. To these may be added a great number of other commodities, which, though of less price, are of much greater use.

Sheep, goats, cows, asses, and horses, were not found here upon the first landing of the Europeans, but having been brought in plenty, increased so fast in fertile pastures, as to afford an ample supply.

Here is a vast variety of birds, surpassing all that are to be found in any other part of the world, for beauty, shape, and colour, which will be described in their proper places.

The seas, lakes, and rivers, abound with the greatest plenty and variety of fish.

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the natives of America had arts of their own. They had some notion of painting, and also formed pictures by the beautiful arrangements of feathers of all colours; and in some parts erected stately buildings. Though the use of iron was unknown, they polished precious stones, cut down trees, and made not only small canoes, but boats of considerable bulk. Their hatchets were headed with a sharp flint; and of flints they made knives. Thus at the arrival of the Europeans, they presented a lively picture of the state of mankind in the earliest ages.

America is chiefly divided between the Spanish, English, Portuguese, and the United States. The French and Dutch have, indeed, settlements in South America, called Guiana and Surinam, but these are of little importance. They have also colonies in North America. The Indians are in quiet possession of many large inland tracks. The Spaniards, who discovered the New World, still enjoy the largest and richest portion of it, and thence draw immense wealth.

Next to Spain, the most considerable proprietor of America was Great Britain, which derived a claim to North America from the first discovery of that continent by Sebastian Cabor, in the name of Henry VII. about six years after the discovery of South America by Columbus, in the name of the king of Spain. This northern country was, in general, called Newfoundland, a name now appropriated solely to an island upon its coast. It was a long time before any attempt was made to settle a colony in it. Sir Walter Raleigh, of respectable memory, first shewed the way, by fixing the English standard in that part which he called Virginia, in honour of his royal mistress Queen Elizabeth.

The British nation had, at an immense expence, and with the loss of thousands of gallant subjects, preserved, secured, and extended its colonies so far, as to render it difficult to ascertain the precise bounds of its empire in North America, to the northern and western sides: But, alas! these flattering prospects have been annihilated by a most unhappy contest between the mother country and the colonies, which, after a continuance of eight years, at great expence of blood and treasure, terminated in the establishment of a new republic, stiled, "The Thirteen United States of America."

We propose to divide the New World into three parts:

I. NORTH AMERICA, prefixing to our account such parts, continental, insular, &c. as have been discovered, visited, or described, by *Captain Cook*.

II. WEST INDIAN and AMERICAN ISLANDS.

III. SOUTH AMERICA.

C H A P.