

## CHAP. V.

*Of the fertility of the soil, with the commodities and other advantages of New England.*

SINCE the charter of the gospel was first opened to the world, the privileges of which only remain with the church, it need not be wondered at if the patents of eternal prosperity should be altered, lest they should prove, as often they have done before, through man's corruption, the hindrance of piety and devotion; nor is it to be expected that the professed followers of the Lamb should all of them in this age hear of a land flowing with milk and honey, when their fore-runners were made to fly into the wilderness from the dragon, of which sort, in a literal sense, is this place, whither Providence hath occasionally brought the inhabitants of New England; yet may they say, that God hath not been a wilderness nor a land of darkness unto them therein, it being a country capable, with good improvement, to maintain a nation of people, after once it comes to be subdued. As for the soil, it is for the general more mountainous and hilly than otherwise, and in many places very rocky and full of stones; yet intermingled with many plains and valleys, some of which are sandy and inclinable to barrenness, yea, most of them are such; especially those that abound with pitch pines, and there are many of that sort; as likewise many swamps or boggy places, full of small bushes and under-wood. But here and there are many rich and fruitful spots of land, such as they call interval land, in levels and champaign ground, without trees or stones, near the banks of great rivers, that oftentimes are overflowed by the channels of water that run besides them, which is supposed to enrich the soil that is so watered: the fatness of the earth, that is by the rains and melting of the snow washed from the surface of the earth in the higher parts of the country, being by these floods cast upon those levels, that lie lowest by the sides of these greater streams. In many such places their land hath

been known to be sown or planted full forty years together, without any considerable abatement of the crop, never failing of thirty or forty bushels per acre : but for the generality of the soil, it is of a lighter sort of earth, whose fruitfulness is more beholding to the influences of the heavens, [and the] advantages of the seasonable skill and industry of the husbandmen, than [to] the strength of its own temper. Such as came hither first upon discovery, chanced to be here in the first part of the summer, when the earth was only adorned with its best attire of herbs and flowers, flourishing with all such early fruits which weather-beaten travellers are wont to refresh themselves with the beholding of ; as strawberries, gooseberries, raspberries, cherries, and whorts ; as they observed that first landed about Martha's Vineyard : whence they promised themselves and their successors a very flourishing country, as they did that first landed upon the coast of Florida. But as it is proverbially said of some parts of England, they do not every where abound with mines, though there be lead in Mendon Hills : so neither did, or doth, every place abound with those flourishing and alluring aspects, nor is the country at all times found of the verdant hue, though many places do naturally abound with some of those berries, as other places with grapes, which gave great hopes of fruitful vineyards in after time : but as yet either skill is wanting to cultivate and order the roots of those wild vines, and reduce them to a pleasant sweetness, or time is not yet to be spared to look after the culture of such fruits as rather tend to the *benè*, or *melius esse*, of a place, than to the bare *esse*, and subsistence thereof : each season of the year, so fast, as it were, treading upon the heels of that which went before, that little time is to be found spare, for that tillage which is not of absolute necessity, but for pleasure and delight. Yet are all sorts of grain found to grow pretty naturally there, that are wont to be sown in the spring season, (the cold oftentimes proving so extreme as it kills all that is committed to the earth before winter, especially in the Massachusetts colony.) That which the land produceth upon the surface

thereof, is that upon which the inhabitants have their dependence for the most certain part of their wealth: for that which is hid in the bowels thereof, the present generation either wanting leisure or ability to ransack so deep under ground: nor have they that could spare time, and have more skill than their neighbors in the nature of minerals, met with any thing that promiseth better than iron, with which the country every where abounds; most of their §common§ rocks being observed to be of such a §kind of § grit—as those in the northern parts, as Acady and Nova Francia, are judged to incline as much to copper, as some that have been on that coast have reported. In many places are supposed to be medicinal waters, whither, upon the first discovery of such springs, the halt, maimed, and diseased did resort frequently, in hope they might leave their crutches upon the trees adjoining, as the Papists have used to do at the chapel of the Lady of Loretto; but upon the very best experience that hath been known, it is conceived that all is but some springs passing through iron mines, and have gotten some tincture of a chalybiat quality, the pouring down many draughts of which is said by some, that have made experiment, to have had the same effect with those kind of pills, that are given to remove the obstructions of the spleen, and may be useful, if the quantity they use to drink down do not more harm by the coldness of the potion, than the quality of such chymical matters do them good. As for medicinal herbs, Gerard<sup>a</sup> and Johnson,<sup>b</sup> as well as ||Theophrastus|| of old, might have made herbals here as well as in any other particular country; the same trees, plants and \*shrubs,\* roots, herbs and fruits being found either naturally growing here that are known to do in the northern countries of the like climate of Europe, and upon trial have been found as effectual in their operation, and do thrive as well when transplanted; as the oak, walnut, ash, elm, maple, hornbeam, abundance of pine, spruce, etc.; also a kind of white cedar in many swamps; and such herbs as are common in England—elecampane, angelica, gentian, St. John's wort, agrimony, betony, and the like.<sup>1</sup>

|| Theophemus ||

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<sup>1</sup> Here is a blank of two or three lines in the MS.—π.

As for living creatures—as the natives were not known to bring any along with them, so neither do they keep any (but small dogs,) according to the custom of more civil nations: so neither were here any found but wild deer, and in some places skunks, wild cats, and in some places porcupines, a sort of conies, and hares, moose, bears, wolves, and now and then a straggling ounce, like the tigers in the West Indies. Yet is the place capable to breed and nourish all sorts of serviceable beasts and cattle, which other parts of the world have subdued and tamed, to their use.

The like may be said of feathered fowl, especially such as live upon the water, which abound as much here as in any other place. The bird of the greatest rarity in this place, if not in the world, is a small one, not exceeding the bigness of a great bee, called Humbirds, from the noise they make with their wings, while they are flying from one flower to another to suck out the honey; but never set their feet down. Turkies also, and pigeons, (that come in multitudes every summer, almost like the quails that fell round the camp of Israel in the wilderness,) partridges, quails, and all birds of prey, by nature's instinct, or by conduct of Divine Providence, have found the way into these ends of the earth, as well as into any other part of the habitable world: nor did *Hircinia Sylva* go beyond what is found here for wild creatures, it used of old to be haunted with, which since is turned into a fruitful and pleasant land; as this also may be in time. Nor is the sea less propitious to the mariner and fisherman, than the earth and dry land is all over the country to the diligent husbandman—the bays, rivers, creeks, [and] havens, abounding with all sorts of fish, that the coast of Greenland and Norway, or the narrow seas are stored with; which, as it was the first improvement that ever was made of this coast, so it is still the most certain and stable commodity the country affordeth; although provisions of all sorts here are plentiful, and as cheap as in most parts of Europe, great quantities of which are daily transported from hence for the relief of many other places of the English in the West Indies.