

SOUTH AMERICA

1343. This, the smaller half of the New World, has at least four-fifths of its area within the tropics, and hence yields chiefly tropical products; but here as elsewhere the temperate area, relatively to its extent, furnishes a greater abundance of commercial commodities, and it is in this part of the continent that the rate of increase in the production of such commodities, and the development of means of distribution for them, are now most rapid, and European immigration is most constant.

1344. The lofty chains of the Andes, on the west side of the continent, form an important climatic barrier. In the latitudes in which the trade winds prevail (52) they arrest the moisture-laden winds from the Atlantic, draining the moisture out of winds that had already been partly drained in their course over the continent further east (64). The western slopes of these mountains, on the other hand, receive in these latitudes no rain from the Atlantic, and as far as 33° S. little or none from the Pacific. On that side the tendency of the wind is to blow away from the land (52; comp. 1376), and the rarefaction of the air on the narrow strip west of the Andes is not enough to counteract that tendency. The Andes also constitute a great obstacle to communication between the east and west coasts. More than one railway reaches a height of upwards of 14,000 feet before attaining the tablelands between the principal chains of the mountains. Here also applies the remark made in par. 1323 as to the probable increasing importance of water-power with the growth of population.

1345. Some of the mighty rivers to the east of the Andes form excellent waterways. The Orinoco, in the north of the continent, is navigable for steamers continuously for nearly a thousand miles. The Amazon is navigable without interruption to the base of the Andes, a distance of 2,600 miles from its mouth, and 50,000 miles of navigation are afforded by the main stream and its tributaries great and small. Many of these tributaries, however, have their navigable course greatly obstructed by falls and rapids; so, for example, the Xingu and Tapajos on the right bank, the upper Rio Negro on the left. The Madeira is continuously navigable for steamers to beyond 8½° S., but there then follows a series of falls and rapids extending over a distance of two hundred miles, interrupting the communication between Bolivia and Brazil. Since 1912 a railway completes the communication