

## CHAPTER IX.

Signantenejo—A party taken prisoner by the Mexicans—Don Vicente Amaro—Mr. Wood proceeds to Acapulco—Captivity—Departure—Acapulco—Death of William Harris—Cape Velas—Coast of Nueva Granada.—Arrival at Panama.

ON Saturday, December 5th, 1846, we anchored off the Morro de Petatlan, a few miles south of Siguantenejo, intending to examine that port and carry on the chain of magnetic observations. We were now on Anson's cruising ground, when watching for the Acapulco galleon. Indeed, Mr. Walter, the historian of his voyage, describes a bay in latitude  $17^{\circ} 36' 0''$  north, about thirty leagues west of Acapulco, which, considering his means of ascertaining the true position, accords sufficiently with our calculations to render it almost certain that the place in which we had anchored was the same as that in which the Centurion refitted and watered. Even without these recollections of bygone times, the bay itself was pleasing enough to interest us. A steep and rugged coast, bounded by white rocks and barren islets, with a heavy surf breaking upon them, opened out into a pretty little cove about

a mile and a half in depth and less than three-quarters of a mile broad. The Centurion appears to have been the first foreign ship that visited Siguantenejo, the Spaniards, in accordance with their former policy, prohibiting all intercourse with the intermediate ports. It is a snug little port, and at present a depôt for logwood, a valuable part of the raw produce of Mexico; still, with Acapulco so near, the state of the country must be widely changed before it can become of importance.

On Sunday, the 6th of December, we pulled in the port with two boats, and landed in the north-east bight of the bay, in order to avoid the surf. Nothing could exceed the placidity of the scene; the beach was smooth and silvery, and fringed by beautiful shrubs and trees. We imagined from the silence and absence of cultivation that the neighbourhood was uninhabited; and although we found signs of wood-cutting, and evident marks of men having recently been there, yet the idea that we were intruding or that any one could dream of molesting us was far from our thoughts.

The purser and surgeon proceeded to shoot and to collect specimens of natural history, Mr. Wood and Mr. Staunton had just landed, and Mr. Hill and Mr. Trollope were putting up the instruments and getting everything ready for the captain to commence observations, when all at once a rush of men and a cry from some of our people, "Here are the natives!" was heard. From every break in the wood came out a sort of Falstaff's ragged regiment, fully armed however, who drew up in tolerable order. The words of command, "Make ready—preparar—pronto," were given, and the double file presented

arms, not as a mark of honour, but apparently as if about to fire. We were surprised beyond measure. It was totally unexpected; we were unarmed, and all we could do was to confront the motley guard so suddenly turned out for our reception. Captain Kellett advanced, and endeavoured to explain to the chief of the party who and what we were. The only reply he received was, that we must remain where we were until the arrival of "el Señor Comandante." We commenced taking observations, displayed the books, and pointed out the "London" marked on most of them; but it was of no avail to use such arguments to the people we had to deal with.

In half an hour the "Comandante" made his appearance. He came on horseback, in a loose cotton jacket, a coarse country hat on his head, and a huge sabre by his side. He was full of assumed importance; and after a consultation, in which he displayed his ignorance and uncertainty as to the course he ought to adopt, he came to the conclusion that, as our language and that of the Americans was the same, we might be citizens of the United States, and that at all events it was safer for him to consider us so. Unfortunately we had no ordinance from the Mexican Government, as to the purport of our voyage. The books, the instruments, our unarmed condition, and buttons with the crown upon them, and numerous other little circumstances, would have convinced any one of common discernment or education that we were what we stated ourselves to be; but it had no effect upon this obstinate and ignorant man, and after half an hour's delay he intimated that we must go to a logwood shed on a little eminence about half a mile dis-

tant, and that Mr. Wood, the commander of the Pandora, should be allowed to proceed to Acapulco and receive instructions from the Captain-General of the State. On being told that on board there were sick, who needed assistance, he permitted the surgeon, Mr. Goodridge, to return; the rest were told to consider themselves prisoners.

Great was the excitement when the news became known on board. Some were eager for a rescue, and the ship immediately weighed, but light winds and calms prevented her from making any progress, and she was obliged to anchor again. Our night on shore was passed miserably; the morning brought better things. Mr. Goodridge arrived with a good breakfast; after which a clean shirt and a shave made us look upon our condition, captives as we were, with different eyes. About noon the Herald came in with the sea-breeze, and took up her position within half a mile of us. The Comandante, who rejoiced in the name of Don Vicente Amaro, seemed rather alarmed at the size of the ship, and evidently feared that a rescue or an attack would be attempted. He assured Captain Kellett that if he saw any preparations for that purpose, he would immediately mount us on horses, and send us into the interior. No doubt an attack from the vessel would have repulsed treble the number opposed; but in the meantime we were unarmed, and could have offered little resistance, and we should have been in the interior and our guards dispersed in all directions.

On Monday we erected a tent, and communication by the dingy took place three or four times. We were supplied with good fresh meat and vegetables, and,

though provoked by the needless and irritating detention, we occupied our time better than in useless complaining. Don Vicente Amaro became occasionally excited and violent; he appeared overcome with the difficulties of the position he had placed himself in, and got half-drunk to ease his mind. Then he would ask us for spirits, and Captain Kellett would send him a bottle of mild claret—rather a febrifuge than a means of excitement—as better adapted to his condition. One day he brought down his daughters, really very nice girls, who were much interested in looking at the ship. On that occasion he made a long bombastic speech to the effect that, as he was to be in the bosom of his family, it was to be a day of peace. His visits were most annoying. The purser, the late Mr. T. Woodward, from his excellent knowledge of Spanish, was the usual spokesman on these occasions. The conferences generally ended with Amaro's embracing us in the Mexican fashion, and begging the Captain to send him some *agua ardiente*. Mr. Trollope always avoided him, and on observing this conduct he particularly sought to speak to that officer, graciously saying, "You need not be alarmed for the result; I have no bad intentions." Mr. Trollope, in the best Spanish he could get up, assured him that the English were not in the habit of fearing the Mexicans.

The natives were far from uncivil. We were objects of curiosity to all: they pressed around us, looked into the tent, and examined every article we permitted them to look at. A good deal of nonsense was uttered by the boys of the place; one saying that he should wait for the hanging, another making signs that we were to have our

throats cut, and a third showing a pit in which we were to be buried. The women however with one accord declared that they would not have us hurt; and no doubt had any extreme measures been attempted this petticoat interest would have been exerted in our behalf. Foreigners with blue eyes and fair complexions generally produce too favourable an impression upon Spanish señoritas to be easily forgotten. Among the nations of Teutonic descent, the English, the Dutch, or the Germans, those who have dark eyes and hair are considered the most handsome; among the Spaniards and their descendants the reverse is the case, and a pure Saxon—even with hair of the reddest hue—is generally admired by the fair sex.

The group of people which usually crowded around us was, as regards form, feature, and colour, as diversified as anything can be supposed to be. There was the glossy skin and thick lips of the negro, the angular feature and the long hair of the Aztec, the lively eye and the handsome countenance of the Spaniard, and every shade of difference which an intermixture of those widely different races had produced. Leperos—not meaning literally lepers, but houseless, half-clad beggars, whose only dress consisted of a pair of trowsers, a light cloak, and a jacket—formed by far the greater proportion. It was truly a motley group—small in stature, various in colour, ignorant and ill-clad,—a mob at whose mercy we should not have liked to have been, though their conduct towards us was civil and even kind.

Close to our tent there was a fresh-water stream forming a deep pool, in which we bathed, until the last day,

when we were deterred by finding a number of alligators basking in it. Well might we have exclaimed, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise." The nights were cool and pleasant, the forenoons hot until the sea-breeze set in, when the temperature became delightful. It was the healthy season, and no one suffered; had the detention taken place at Manzanilla, a locality notorious for its insalubrity, we might have had a different tale to tell.

The scenery was very picturesque. It might have been called a dense wood, with patches of savanas, and avenues here and there. Around our tent were palms, American aloes, tamarind-trees, and bananas. The roads were mere paths; and some of our men, who went up to the Puebla, eight or ten miles distant, reported the country clear of wood, but poorly cultivated. We might have made an excursion, but we did not consider it proper to ask a favour from the worthy Don Vicente Amaro. The men, it appears, went on sufferance, and Captain Kellett did not hear of it until we had returned to the ship, or else this little escapade would not have taken place.

On Saturday the Pandora returned from Acapulco with a reprimand from the Governor-General to the Comandante for his stupidity, and a caution how he in his ignorance committed his country. Don Vicente on hearing this seemed quite crest-fallen, and we never saw him afterwards. The crowds of soldiers and idlers, men, women, and children, disappeared as if by magic, and within an hour the place was as quiet as it had been on our arrival on Sunday. Having nothing further to detain us, we continued our voyage (December 14th) to Panama.

The shore between Siguantenejo and Acapulco is remarkably bold, the mountains rising from the sea almost immediately, while to the eastward of the highland of Marques, a long plain, thickly covered with trees, extends some leagues inland before any perceptible rise takes place. From this circumstance Acapulco is easy to be distinguished, particularly when coming from the eastward, as the alteration in the features of the coast is most apparent. Although the distance between the two ports is only 120 miles, yet we were detained so much by calms and light winds, that we did not anchor at Acapulco before the 16th. The sea-breeze generally dies away about nine or ten o'clock in the forenoon, and calm prevails for the rest of the day. By keeping closer in shore and taking advantage of the land-breeze more progress would no doubt be made, but for this purpose an amount of local knowledge would be required which at present we do not possess.

About sunrise the mountains of Acapulco are beheld in all their splendour; their summits are then free from clouds and mist, which is never the case when the day is advanced. The remarkable Tetras de Coyuca, four leagues from the entrance of the port, are the highest peaks of the range, and from an excellent landmark. In approaching closer to Acapulco the Farallon del Obispo, a curious white islet in the northern part of the outer bay, will be seen. It is about fifty feet high, and from whatever direction a vessel is coming furnishes a distinguishing mark.

To speak of Acapulco would only be a repetition of what all navigators, from the days of Cortes to the

present time, have said. It seems always to have had a greater name than it deserved. Its sole recommendation was its port—a perfect harbour,—where the gold and silver of Mexico and Peru and the rich fabrics of the East met at an annual fair, on the arrival and departure of the treasure-ships. True, a communication between it and Callao and Guayaquil was kept up, but this intercourse did not much conduce to the wealth and fame of the place. Apart from its magnificent harbour and the annual visits of the Spanish treasure-ships, Acapulco was never a place of any importance. In 1748 it was described by Bowen as “being, except at the fair, a dirty, paltry town of two or three hundred thatched houses and hovels.” In 1768 a French traveller, M. de Pages, called it “a miserable little place, though dignified with the name of a city,” an epithet it still deserves.

In the golden days of Spain, the Castellan, or chief justice, received 20,000 dollars a year, besides all his perquisites and fees of office, which enabled the Spanish officials to return to their native country with large fortunes, whatever the salary might happen to be. This practice was so well known and acted upon so openly, that offices, even those with a mere nominal salary, were notoriously put up for sale, realizing great profits to the minister or his subordinates. In this very port of Acapulco the Cura's nominal income was only 180 dollars, yet he was in the habit of making 14,000 or 15,000 by means of fees. When such a state of things prevailed we can excuse much that is wrong in these unhappy countries.

The castle of San Carlos commands the harbour and

the town. Its ramparts and bastions make a fine appearance, and shed an air of grandeur over the place, which on landing is soon dissipated. The castle, though well and skilfully constructed, is itself commanded by the adjacent heights, and offered no resistance to the North Americans when they occupied all the ports of Mexico. But it was sufficiently strong for its day; the Indians on one side and the Buccaneers on the other were the only enemies Spain had to fear. The town is poor and miserable; there are two churches of no note, about thirty or forty houses, and a suburb of huts and reed hovels. Earthquakes have been numerous, and slight shocks are frequently felt.

In the harbour we found an Ecuador ship of 300 tons, a Hawaiian brig, a Mexican schooner, and five or six small coasters. The authorities were full of civility. The captain of the port spoke English fluently, and he as well as the Governor seemed anxious to efface every recollection of the unfortunate and blundering zeal of our friend Don Vicente Amaro.

On the night of the 17th of December, Willam Harris, one of our carpenters, lowered himself down from a main-deck port under the half-deck, and attempted to swim on shore. He had hardly got fifty yards off when he cried out for help. A boat was immediately despatched to render assistance, but it did not succeed in reaching him. Several sharks were cruizing round the ship, and it is probable that they tore him to pieces and devoured him. On the following day we tried our utmost to recover the body, by creeping for it, but not a particle could be found. It was a fearful end of a wretched life.

The poor unhappy man did not appear to possess a redeeming quality. In order to be exempted from work, he had, for nearly a twelvemonth, feigned to be crippled in his right arm, by checking the circulation of the blood; and so well had he succeeded, that even the surgeons were partially deceived. At last the fraud was discovered, and the impostor placed as prisoner under the half-deck, whence he endeavoured to effect his escape.

On the 19th we sailed from Acapulco, and crept along the shore at the rate of twenty or thirty miles a day. The lofty peaks of the mountains of Guatemala were in sight, and for many days we carried a chain of trigonometrical heights and distances. On Christmas-day we had a strong breeze from north-west, a Tehuantepec gale, as it is called. All our old sails were bent, and many split; the festivities were interfered with, and pies, puddings, pâtés, jellies, and soup, got ready for the occasion, made an *olla podrida* in the midshipman's berth. On the following day it cleared off; but the Herald lay to, while the Pandora ran, and thereby succeeded in reaching Panama a fortnight before us.

On the 1st of January, 1847, we sighted Cape Velas, well described in its name, the rocks being white and steep, and resembling the sails of a vessel. We were baffled there, as we had been all the voyage, with light winds and calms; and sighting Cape Blanco, Punta Giones, and Cagno Isle, we were, on the 11th, off Montuoso, a wooded island, standing almost by itself in the midst of the ocean. Coyba, or Quibo, and Quicara were in sight at night. The former used to be a favourite resort of the Buccaneers, on account of the water and

wood to be procured there. Captain Belcher, however, when touching at the place in 1837, was unable to find a watering place. In an island of such size, many streams may have been overlooked; in our own survey in 1848 and -49 abundance of water was discovered. Quicara differs in aspect from Coyba, being as rugged and steep as the other is wooded and luxuriant.

Since leaving San Francisco, until off the Bay of Panama, we had been in sight of land, thus coasting nearly 2500 miles. On the 15th of January however we saw nothing but the sky and water; but our proximity to Panama was sufficiently evinced by the appearance of buques, large canoes with set square sails, which perform coasting voyages of some distance. On the 16th we were off the island of Galera, its umbrella-tree (probably some *Sterculiaceae*) standing up like a beacon to warn the navigator of the proximity of the dangerous shoal of San Jose. The Punta de Cocos, the south extreme of San Miguel Island, is crowned with a most flourishing tree, which covers it in a remarkable manner. It is a curious coincidence, that one of the passages to Panama should thus be pointed out by two trees so extraordinary in shape. On entering the Bay of Panama strong tides are felt, as may be imagined from the fact of the rise and fall being, in high spring-tides, at the city of Panama, twenty-one feet. We experienced them in their full strength; the ship, though going two and a half knots, appeared to stand still.

On the 17th the breeze freshened up into a northerly wind, bringing clear weather. We seemed to rush past the northernmost of the Pearl Islands,—San Bartolome

with its cocoa-nut palms, and Saboga and Pacheque with their bright sandy beaches and piles of pearl oyster shells. We sighted the tree on Chepillo Island, another remarkable beacon in the bay, and before sunset anchored off Flaminco Island, the tower of Panama Viejo bearing N.  $5^{\circ}$  E., and the cathedral of the city of Panama N.  $53^{\circ}$  W.