

CHAPTER VI.

City of Panama—Ruins of Panama Viejo—The islands of Flaminco, Taboga, and Taboguilla—Departure for the Straits of Juan de Fuca—Coyba—Death of seamen—An American vessel—Seaweed—Cape Flattery rocks.

PANAMA makes from the sea a fine appearance. The churches, towers, and houses, showing above the line of the fortifications, stand out from the dark hills inland with an air of grandeur and pretension to which there is no equal on the west coast of America. It tells of days when the church and the fort arose together, and power and dominion, both spiritual and temporal, went hand in hand. We landed just before sunrise, always in the tropics the most beautiful time of day, and at the height of the spring tide, at the Monk's Gate, in the sea-front of the fortification. The first building we came to was a nunnery, with a wide receding doorway and a turning cupboard for maintaining communication without seeing with whom. The Calle Real, in which the convent is situated, is a respectable street, running east and west, and having a quiet, stately, comfortless air. The clumsy

balconies in the upper stories are but little relieved by the unglazed grated windows, the plain doorways on the ground-floor, by any variety in the buildings, or by the open shop-windows to which English cities owe so much of their gay appearance.

Panama has several buildings which should be noticed. The Jesuits' College in particular, though not completed, is worth seeing, and evidently bears witness to the staid and sober magnificence with which that order ever constructed their public edifices. Lima itself has not a building so perfect in design, chaste and finished in detail and execution, as this half-completed yet ruinous pile. The church unroofed is a garden and poultry-yard, the great court a barrack for soldiers; the beautiful façade of the south front is blocked up with sheds and ill-built cottages. If completed, it would have been a vast edifice. Over the principal gateway is the date 1758, only fifteen years before the Order was abolished by Pope Clement XIV., and over the church-door is their famous motto, all but defaced and torn down,—“*In nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur.*”

Another edifice in ruins attracted our attention; it had been a church, but little more than the four walls remained, and the area was filled with the orange, banana, pomegranate, and cocoa-nut palm. Two large and rich-toned bells were just elevated off the ground, and a flat arch of very peculiar construction, having the least possible amount of upward curve, were the chief objects of interest. The span of the arch, apparently as firm as when first built, was forty feet. The nunnery of Santa Clara, the tower of which, although in ruins, still over-

looks the north-east bastion, is turned into stables; and of the eight parochial churches and thirty chapels which the city was once said to contain, only six besides the cathedral remain. The cathedral is a large, lofty building, on the west side of the Plaza: its situation is an admirable one; but the structure is not worthy of it, being a large rambling edifice, of bastard Italian style, in very bad taste both inside and out,—gaudy tinsel, and pretension without elegance. The towers are large and lofty, redeeming it from insignificance; but although imposing, and an ornament to the city from a distance, they are by no means well proportioned.

We found the streets gloomy and the houses dirty; the wooden balconies and the unglazed windows prevalent. Yet the town is European in its aspect, and there is a solidity, an air of having seen better days about the place, that made it, as a whole, not displeasing to us, accustomed as we had been to the make-shift temporary buildings, and mean, paltry houses, in all the towns on the coast. The fortifications are admirably constructed, but in many parts completely ruined. The north-east bastion has fallen down within the last few years; the south and west ramparts are still in good condition, affording delightful walks, and displaying some fine specimens of ordnance in thirty-two-pounder brass guns, bearing the royal arms of Spain and the date "1773, Anno xvii., 1779, Anno xxiii., Caroli III. Rex Hispaniæ et Ind." These were from the arsenals of Barcelona and Carthagena. "*Tempora mutantur*" one may say at every step.

The best view of Panama is gained from the hill of

Ancon, behind the town. St. Lawrence should be the patron saint of the city, for its shape much resembles a gridiron, the part outside forming the handle. The city, that part within the walls, is called San Felipe; it is nearly square, and surrounded by the sea. The suburb, or Santa Ana, is almost as extensive as the city itself, though not so well built. The markets make a fair display; one is held close to the Watergate, in a narrow inconvenient shed, which however they were about beginning to rebuild. The landing at this gate is bad, even at high water; but at ebb-tide it is execrable, which is the more provoking because a natural pier, or the foundation of it, is ready made in the extensive reefs lying nearly half a mile east and south-east of the ramparts. The most extensive market, however, is held in the suburbs; the supply of vegetables, fruit, grain, and fish is generally very good. Eggs are plentiful, poultry not so much so, and the meat is of inferior quality.

On the 11th of April we rode over to the ruins of Panama Viejo, the town destroyed by Sir Henry Morgan, the buccaneer, in the year 1673. The Spaniards, however, say that they had been before weary of the place, and had determined to leave it on account of its having no harbour. Certainly the new site is in every respect superior, and they had reason on their side in being weary of it on account of the bad landing. An extensive mud-flat renders it impracticable at ebb-tide; and at high water, from its extreme shallowness, it is very inconvenient. The spot is now deserted, and it is necessary to have a guide, a *practico*, to find it. A

tower, well and solidly constructed, is as firm as when first built. An arch, two or three piers of a bridge, and some fragments of a wall, and a chapel, are the only other remains to be found. The spot is hardly ever visited, except by foreigners. Flat hills, and copses of wood; savanas,—that beautiful word, which always seems to express more than it actually means, is very appropriate here;—grassy slopes, losing themselves in wild thickets, or in wooded glades, where the trees stand as in a park, make the neighbourhood of Panama very pleasing. But roads are wanting, and in the wet season, which more or less comprises two-thirds, and very nearly three-fourths, of the year, the country is almost impassable, and will continue so until some great improvement is made in draining, and in the formation of the roads, which, constructed as they are at present, without suitable regard to soil or foundation, and with no means of carrying off the torrents which occasionally flood them, cannot be expected to last very long.

For the last few years the Admiralty have occupied a store on Flaminco Island, in which we found our provisions. Flaminco is a pleasant spot, and almost a pyramid in shape. The only flat is on the north-east side, where a Mr. Dawson, a Russian, expecting that they would be permanently occupied by the Government, has erected several houses and sheds. It is not however convenient, either for landing or bringing off heavy stores at any time, except at the top of high water, and even then it is difficult. Taboga is two miles long to north-west and east-south-east, and does not average one mile in breadth; its highest hill, the south-east peak, is,

according to barometrical measurement, 935 feet above the level of the sea. The island, though rocky, is fertile, and, considering its size, as delightful a spot as can be found. The people are kind and obliging, and have many of those good qualities in which the milder races of southern climes appear to excel,—those qualities which go so far towards making life agreeable and smoothing its rugged path. The Taboga bribes, which are little more than large and clumsy canoes, go daily with the tide to Panama, laden with eggs, fowls, pigs, yams, bananas, camotes, and pine-apples. Taboguilla, the neighbouring island, is similar to Taboga, by whose inhabitants it is partially cultivated. The island is 710 feet above the sea, and has little level ground, except at the summit.

We now made preparations for our voyage to the Straits of Juan de Fuca, and received three bullocks on board. The respective weights were 196 lbs., 268 lbs., and 201 lbs., which will give a fair notion of the small size and poor condition of the animals generally met with on this coast. On the 16th of April, 1846, we departed, and at noon, with a fresh northerly breeze, ran out of the Bay of Panama, going seven or eight knots an hour. This was an unhoped-for piece of good fortune, as the bay is remarkable for baffling winds and calms, and ships are often as many as six days before clearing Punta Mala. On the 18th, about noon, the Pandora was struck by a waterspout. She was about four miles and a half from us, north-east. A squall of wind and rain took us from south-west, and when it reached her a waterspout descended and rapidly approached. Lieutenant Wood

describes it as gyrating from left to right,—an observation of some interest, coinciding as it does with the rotatory motion of the hurricane-storms in the northern hemisphere,—that is, from east to west, round by the north. The column of water was about thirty feet in diameter at the base, small in the centre, and crooked in its direction or elevation. It broke before it struck the vessel, but again united, and then took her aback, and gave her a shower of salt water. The precaution of covering the hatchways having been taken, no inconvenience was experienced. The barometer, standing at thirty inches, was not affected, and the breeze returned to south-west soon afterwards.

Quibo or Coyboa, which we now approached, has been noticed from the earliest times. Dampier, who visited it in 1685, says, "It is extremely convenient for wooding and watering; a rapid stream runs into the sea, with a sandy beach, on which boats land with ease, while large trees grow close to the water's edge." In December, 1742, Anson, in the *Centurion*, completed his supplies of wood and water here in two days.

Light, variable winds, calms, occasional squalls or puffs, for they were not heavy, with a pretty good quantum of rain, thunder, and lightning—so vivid and close, that again and again we thanked Sir William Snow Harris for his invaluable conductors,—formed our weather for many days. On the 25th of April we appeared to be among opposing currents, ripples, freshes, and a general disturbance or irregular motion in the surface of the water. At nine A.M. we were watching an eclipse of the sun; it lasted nearly three hours, and, although

only partial, it had a considerable effect on the heat and light.

On the 23rd of April, William Murphy, quarter-master, died from fever and a variety of chronic complaints, which the trying climate of the last few months had brought to a crisis; and on the 1st of May, Frederick Brandt, A.B. Both were old, as seamen's lives go,—fifty years or upwards. The climate, though perhaps aiding their death, certainly did not cause it. A few days afterwards, on the 13th of May, a third death occurred—that of James Cook, our rope-maker. The beautiful service for the dead appears more impressive at sea than in other situations. The silence within the ship, disturbed by nothing but the slow tolling of the bell,—the attentive and even pious demeanour of the men,—the unmarked spot in which the body is committed to the deep,—seem to shadow forth the unknown and illimitable eternity far more than the most solemn pageantry on land.

On the 16th of May, in 10° north and $100^{\circ} 39'$ west, we fell in with the first spirit of the trade-wind; it sprang up in the forenoon, first from north-north-west, then it failed again for about an hour, but before sunset came fresh and steady, varying between north-north-east and east-north-east; its general direction being north-north-east. On the 24th of May, in 12° north and $116^{\circ} 42'$ west, we experienced a decrease in the temperature; the thermometer stood at 77° and 78° ; but the change from 86° and 88° seemed to us immense—it was a new climate. The nights began to be more cloudy; strong breezes, with a head sea, roused us as well as the change

of temperature. The Pandora caught occasionally some bonita, but we were not so fortunate*.

On the morning of the 3rd of June we passed the tropic of Cancer in 130° west. On the previous day the sun was vertical; and the weather seemed cooler the nearer we approached it. This has frequently been noticed, and is analogous in some measure to the distribution of heat during the day: the highest degree of temperature is generally not observed at noon, but about two P.M. On the 4th we had a sort of epitome of the weather during the passage; calm, light winds, and fresh breezes succeeding each other. A giant petrel was shot and picked up. The down and feathers of the breast of this bird were extraordinarily thick, adapted, one would imagine, more for arctic than tropical regions. It weighed about six pounds, and measured, from wing to wing, ten feet.

On the 7th of June, in the forenoon, a sail was reported—the first we had seen since leaving Panama. Her movements caused some interest. We were on the

* On the 12th of May, 9° north, 97° west, we tried for soundings, and obtained the following results:—

At 500 fathoms, 44° Fahrenheit.

400	„	46	„	Surface 87°.
300	„	48	„	Temperature of air, 84°.
200	„	53	„	Barometer, 30.04 inches.
100	„	56	„	
50	„	66	„	
40	„	77	„	
30	„	81	„	
20	„	83	„	
10	„	85	„	

A plate seen at 22 fathoms depth.

starboard and she on the opposite tack, when, perceiving us, she hauled the mainsail up, took top-gallant sails and royals in, and dodged about, as if waiting for us, having an American ensign and pendant with a signal flying. However, about noon, when still hull down, she made sail, and, being the better sailer, soon left us behind. She was probably waiting for her consort, or imagined us to belong to her squadron, and as soon as the mistake was discovered, thought it not worth while to waste more time. Our heads were full of the American war, in consequence of the dispute about the Oregon territory, which no doubt aided the interest felt in seeing a sail for the first time during a long and tedious voyage.

On the 12th of June, in lat. 33° north, long. 140° west, we considered that the trade-wind failed us. It had not been very propitious, but moderate and fine. The wind, varying between south-south-west and west, carried us to the northward. The temperature rapidly decreased, which braced us up more sharply than was altogether pleasant, living as we had been in a sort of warm bath for six months.

On the 23rd of June, in lat. $47^{\circ} 21'$ N., we passed a shoal of porpoises, a flock of quebrante-huesos (bone-breakers), and complete trees of kelp, the stems of some being four inches in diameter. Captain Cook met with seaweed of an extraordinary size about the same latitude. At daylight on the 24th we found ourselves off Cape Flattery rocks; and thus, after a seventy days' passage without seeing land, was our voyage concluded; yet, thanks to our admirable chronometers, we made the land within a mile,—a nicety of calculation which in

these days is not much to boast of, being performed by three-fourths of the vessels of England and America, as well as France and Holland; but looking back thirty or forty years, the change is immense*.

* On the 6th of June, lat. $26^{\circ} 38'$ north, long. $133^{\circ} 26'$ west, we tried for soundings with the following depths and temperatures:—

At 500 fathoms, 43° Fahrenheit.

400	„	44.5	„	Surface, 71° .
300	„	46	„	Air, 70° .
200	„	50	„	Barometer 30.19 inches.
100	„	64.5	„	
50	„	68	„	
40	„	68	„	
30	„	68	„	
20	„	68	„	
10	„	69	„	

On the 20th of June, lat. $45^{\circ} 30'$ north, long. 133° west, the temperature was, at the depth of

500 fathoms, 42° Fahrenheit.

400	„	42	„	Surface, 52° .
300	„	42	„	Air, 51° .
200	„	42	„	Barometer 30.24 inches.
100	„	45	„	
50	„	47	„	
40	„	47	„	
30	„	48	„	
20	„	48	„	
10	„	48	„	