

CHAPTER XI.

Republic of Ecuador—Hacienda of Soviango—Sasaranga—Tambo of Colosacapi—Cariamango—Gonzanama—River Catamayo—Arrival in Loja—Mr. Pim's Journey to Piscobamba.

WE halted under some willows, and observed with delight the animals feeding upon the fine grass with which the banks were clad. We ourselves were not so fortunate as to obtain any food: the trees around us bore no eatable fruit, and though we applied ourselves assiduously to find some nutritious root, our botanical researches were unproductive, and we had to content ourselves with the hope of arriving in the evening at the hacienda of Soviango. After stopping two hours our journey was continued. There was a great improvement in the aspect of the country: hills had changed into mountains, arid plains into well-watered valleys, and groups of crippled trees had been superseded by shady forests. In the expectation however of reaching Soviango we were disappointed the beasts were too fatigued with the march through the desert to make much progress, and ere long we were benighted, and compelled to bivouac on the top of a

mountain. The provisions left consisted of two plantains and some coffee,—small allowance indeed for four persons who have been travelling all day, and, what is worse, been disappointed in obtaining supplies. Having on the previous night burned the meal, my companion did not permit me to show my culinary acquirements: he himself undertook to roast the plantains and boil the coffee. In the very outset however he met with obstacles: as it was dark, and the ground around the camp steep and rocky, no water could be found, and the little left in the gourd-flask was not sufficient; still he used it, put in the coffee, and in order to make the beverage, as he said, strong and good, it had to boil up three times. Twice the pot was drawn back at the proper moment, but when the experiment was repeated he forgot to protect his finger when touching the handle,—he burnt himself, the vessel dropped, and the coffee flowed on the ground. The accident would have been amusing had we possessed any other beverage, but, having nothing to quench our thirst, it was rather vexing. After supper—*i. e.* after the two plantains had been consumed—we slung our hammocks between some trees, while the guides lay down close to the fire. However, none of us slept much: an empty stomach is the most impatient creditor existing, who, after once making a call, is not quieted until the whole, or at least the greater portion, of the debt due to him has been paid.

We started at daylight, but it was not until we had travelled seven hours that we reached Soviango, an estate surrounded by sugar plantations and standing on an eminence. Our approach had apparently been observed:

at the principal building we were met by two ladies, one of whom proved to be the proprietress of the estate, and begged us to put up in the house. Plenty of Indian corn and Guinea-grass was given to the beasts, and a breakfast immediately got ready for us. The meal was nearly concluded, and we were beginning to feel comfortable, when a cry of fire arose. All rushed into the court-yard: behind the sugar-mill a dense smoke was ascending—the plantations had caught fire. The whole estate was in an uproar; the labourers were seen running down the hill, and the voice of the major-domo was heard giving orders. We followed the ladies behind the mill, where a lamentable spectacle presented itself: several fields had already been reduced to ashes, and the flame, assisted by a strong breeze, was making rapid progress. The fire had hardly touched a field when the cane made a noise like musketry and flew up into the air. The workmen, armed with sticks, tried to knock it out, but their exertions were of no avail; at last the flame reached a rivulet, and expired for want of combustibles.

The damage done was considerable, but the ladies did not seem to be affected by it, being as cheerful as before; their only anxiety was, whether any one had been hurt. When observing our preparations for starting, they begged us to remain. To these tempting solicitations we could not accede: intending to visit Quito, and being still a great distance from that capital, every hour was of importance. We therefore took our leave, thanking the ladies for the hospitable treatment they had bestowed upon us.

We now commenced ascending the principal chain of

the Andes. The temperature became lower, the air purer, and the vegetable and animal kingdoms displayed the most diversified forms. Yellow *Calceolarias* were growing amidst scarlet *Salvias* and blue *Browallias*; humming-birds were resting on the twigs of *Fuchsias*; butterflies and beetles were swarming about, while little black snakes leaped dexterously among the stones. What a profusion of life! what a contrast of colours! Really the aspect of a tropical forest is grand; but that of the Andes a few thousand feet above the sea is beautiful—the whole seems a garden.

Having gained the summit of the mountains separating Saviango from Sasaranga, a fine view broke upon us: on one side we beheld the estate, with its sugar-fields of the most vivid green, charmingly contrasting with the roads, streams, and habitations; on the other, Sasaranga, a village of about fifty houses, and a neat-looking church. The road was one continued zigzag, and it took us about an hour to descend. The habitations in the village being very small, we were compelled to put up at the Cabildo (town-house), a building containing the prison and two large rooms.

We were forced to remain a day at Sasaranga, our Peruvian muleteers having left us, and fresh animals not having been caught. The mode of travelling in Ecuador is peculiar. On the principal roads, at every six or eight leagues, there are *tambos*—buildings for the reception of travellers; at each of them a *tambero*, or inn-keeper, is stationed, who is appointed by Government, and whose duty is to assist in loading and unloading, to fetch fuel, water, and provisions, and procure animals for the

journey, and a cook,—for his trouble he receives one real a day from each party, and the cook half a real. The price for each animal, whether horse or mule, is four reals from one *tambo* to another. While in Ecuador we always availed ourselves of this institution, and, although in many places great disorder and slowness prevails, it proved on the whole highly advantageous. The *tambos* originated in the time of the Incas; they were the post-stages where the royal messengers met and delivered to each other the mysterious *quipos*. The communication was at that time so well kept up, that the kings, at their table at Cuzco, had fish fresh from the sea daily. The descendants of these messengers are still pointed out, and we have had occasion to observe the swiftness with which some of them would keep pace with our animals for leagues together.

On the 9th of August the mules arrived, and we proceeded to adjust our boxes on their backs, but felt the loss of our skilful Peruvians most severely, as we were nearly half an hour getting ready what they did in ten minutes. Our new guides stood by quite coolly, and did not display the slightest wish to assist us. At last we started for the *tambo* of Colosacapi: although the distance is only six leagues, yet, our boxes continually slipping off, we did not reach our destination until late. A large caravan of mules laden with Quina-bark from Loja was arriving at the same time. Each mule carried two bales, from two and a half to three feet long, and a foot and a half broad. The *tambo* was a wretched place,—full of holes, very dirty, and the floor covered with cowdung and other filth. A fire was made, but

there being no chimney, we had to suffer from the smoke all night. The *tambera*, an old woman, very thin and lean, made her appearance; she was accompanied by her dog, which had all its bones sticking out, looking equally miserable. She at once proceeded to cook some soup for us: water was first coloured with some browned onions, and then some Indian corn and a few eggs thrown in, one egg to a pint of water. This mixture, with a fair allowance of dirt, was, it need scarcely be added, very weak, but hungry travellers, who could get nothing else, had to be content.

The next morning there was nobody near the place, save the old woman, who informed us that the people had gone out for our beasts of burden. At noon, finding that no one appeared, we ourselves went out and managed to catch three mules; an additional one was brought in soon after, and at four o'clock we left for Cariamango, accompanied by two Indian guides, who were as stupid as our former ones. It was with great difficulty that we induced them to start, as a thick fog was coming on and the wind began to get up. Notwithstanding this we departed, but were unable to travel more than two leagues, and were obliged to put up at a rancho which we were fortunate enough to fall in with. The hostess, an Indian woman, was in very bad humour, and professed to have no food of any kind to spare. Her daughter however was otherwise disposed, and, when her mother was absent, pointed out a nice goat just killed, and also the place where the potatoes and the maize were kept. When the mistress of the house returned, she could no longer refuse to sell us sufficient to

make a supper of, which in some measure made up for the bad fare of the previous day.

After leaving the rancho, the country became very varied,—woods, hills, and some beautiful valleys in a state of cultivation; there were however but few inhabitants, as was indeed the case along the whole of our road. Late in the afternoon we reached Cariamango, seven leagues from Colisacapi, where we were lodged in the Cabildo. Cariamango is built on a plain, and consists of about a hundred houses, most of which have tiled roofs. It is surrounded by mountains, covered with Quina-forests, which are the property of the village, and from which any one may collect as much as he pleases; the Quina however is of inferior quality, and sells on the spot for from sixteen to eighteen reals the aroba. To the northward of the village there is a remarkable mountain rising like a pillar into the clouds, and having a large cross on the top, which, on high festivals, is visited by religious processions.

Our next stage was Gonzanama, a village of about fifty houses, including a church and a chapel, and situated at the foot of the Cerro de Columbo. The neighbourhood would appear to afford great inducement for settling, being clear of trees, having an excellent soil, well watered by numerous streams, and producing peas, beans, potatoes, wheat, and other vegetables commonly grown in northern Europe, besides those peculiar to the Andes. The climate is delightful; during our stay the thermometer did not rise higher than 67° Fahr. The wet season lasts from November until the middle of May, but during the other months showers are occasionally experienced.

The only complaint made by the inhabitants is of the strong gales of wind, which now and then blow off the roofs of the houses, and sometimes even throw down the buildings. The Quina-trees are abundant in the adjacent mountains; we also for the first time met with the Culen (*Psoralea glandulosa*, Linn.), a shrub about five feet high, with small bluish flowers, and growing in sunny places, on the roadsides, and on the whole Cordillera, from Chile to Quito: its leaves are used as a substitute for tea, but do not produce a very aromatic beverage.

There is no *cabildo* nor *tambo* at Gonzanama, but we did not experience any inconvenience on that account, as we were most hospitably received by Don Juan Cueva, the *teniente* of the place, who happened to be standing before his house, and invited us to stay with him. He was a gentlemanly person, and had a great predilection for the English,—so much so, that on leaving he wrote in our passports, which he, as chief authority, had to sign, that he had given us all the assistance in his power, and had done so the more readily as the Republic of Ecuador was so deeply indebted to Great Britain.

We stayed two days at Gonzanama. In the evenings our host entertained us with ghost stories, accounts of witches, and fairy tales; for the inhabitants of the Andes, like those of other mountainous regions, such as the Highlands of Scotland, the Hartz, and the Alps, have their superstitions, to which they cling with tenacity—a circumstance for which Sir Walter Scott has sufficiently accounted. His favourite subject however was the destruction of the town of Zamora. In the neighbourhood

of that place were some rich gold-mines ; the Spaniards, not content with their produce, tried, by imposing heavy contributions upon the natives, to augment their treasures, until the Indians, unable to bear any longer the oppressive yoke, rose in defence of their liberty. The Spaniards taken were put to death, and the Governor and chief officials were forced to swallow liquid gold, in order that, as the enraged natives expressed themselves, they might at last be able to quench their thirst for that metal. Zamora itself was destroyed, and a heap of ruins indicates at present the spot where once stood one of the richest towns of Upper Peru. Herrera, the Spanish historian, mentions Zamora, and says that lumps of gold weighing four pounds had been found in the mines, and that even one piece of twelve pounds had been sent to the King of Spain. Even now it might be profitable to work these mines ; but it appears that the Indians in the neighbourhood are so hostile, that no white man is permitted to enter their territory.

Don Juan Cueva also acted as judge, and on Sunday, after mass, several men were brought before him for fighting ; he was engaged with the trials until five o'clock, and sentenced some to the stocks and others to be beaten. In the afternoon a great many people assembled in the Plaza, to have a game resembling cricket, but without the bat : the object was to knock down the three wickets, and at the same time to drive the ball as far as possible. The priest joined his parishioners, and appeared to enjoy himself very much. In the evening service was performed, when the images of the saints were paraded and fireworks displayed ; music and dancing

were kept up nearly the whole night. We thought that the quantity of *chicha*, a beer made of Indian corn, that was drunk, tended to make the people rather more noisy than was consistent with the ceremony.

On the 16th of August we succeeded in procuring a couple of Indians sober enough to conduct us as far as Loja, and in the afternoon we left, much to the regret of the kind Don Juan Cueva. On the road, about a league from Gonzanama, we visited the ruins of a village built by the Incas, and situated in a plain. There was one large house, two hundred and fifty feet long and fifty feet in breadth, and standing east and west: the walls were three feet in thickness and built of stone; the doorways were six feet broad. Nothing was standing save the walls, and these were very low and decayed. The art of building arches was unknown to the ancient Peruvians; the roofs of the houses and those of the temples were thatched with straw, and could not long withstand the influence of the weather.

Not being able to reach any house for the night, we were obliged to bivouac under some berberry-bushes, and, after some difficulty, owing to the wetness of the wood, we managed to kindle a fire and prepare some supper. The night passed most unpleasantly; a drizzling rain soon made our ponchos and blankets wet through, and towards morning we were so cold and stiff that we could hardly move our limbs.

When we got up, the beasts—which, as is customary in Ecuador, had been let loose during the night to feed—had strayed, and it was not until after a couple of hours' search that our guides, with the assistance of another

Indian who was passing by, succeeded in finding them. After leaving the place, we descended into a hot valley, where the vegetation had the character of the lower tropical region, the thickets consisting of *Crotons*, Cactuses, Fig-trees, and shrubby *Convolvulaceæ*; on the whole there was little verdure, the effect of the dry season being everywhere visible. About noon we entered a forest, consisting of Chirimoya-trees (*Anona Cherimolia*, Mill.), which were loaded with delicious fruit. The Pine-apple, the Mangosteen, and the Chirimoya are considered the finest fruits in the world; I have tasted them in those localities in which they are supposed to attain their highest perfection,—the Pine-apple in Guayaquil, the Mangosteen in the Indian Archipelago, and the Chirimoya on the slopes of the Andes,—and if I were called upon to act the part of a Paris, I would without hesitation assign “the apple” to the Chirimoya; its taste indeed surpasses that of every other fruit, and Hänke was quite right when he called it a “masterpiece of nature.”

Having rested ourselves half an hour in an Indian hut, and eaten a few eggs and plantains, we continued our march, crossing the river Catamayo, and ascending a ridge of mountains. The road wound in a most circuitous manner, in many places along the edge of precipices, and was barely wide enough to allow the animals to pass. The wind blew a gale, and was accompanied with rain, making our journey very unpleasant. The sun was just setting when we obtained the first sight of the beautiful valley of Cujibamba and the town of Loja. It took us nearly two hours to descend: the rains had made the roads so slippery that the animals could not walk,

but were obliged to put their feet together and slide down—an operation so unpleasant that we were glad when we had reached the bottom in safety. It was eight o'clock before we entered the town, having had to cross one of the rivers between which Loja is situated. We proceeded to the house of Dr. Richard Ekins, an Englishman who had settled and married in the country, and to whom we had a letter of introduction from the British Vice-consul at Payta. Unfortunately the Doctor and his wife were absent from home, but his brother-in-law accommodated us for the night. As there is no inn at Loja we hired, much to the disappointment of our host, several large rooms in the hospital, for which we had to pay a very trifling sum. We also engaged an Indian woman to cook for us. She charged us about two shillings a day, and furnished us with breakfast and dinner, and such a variety of dishes that we could not comprehend how she could provide so much for so small a sum; still she always tried to excuse herself that the meals were not so good as they ought to be, and whenever there was anything wanting which she considered indispensable, she threw all the blame on the state of the weather, telling us that as the rivers were much swollen the supplies could not have come across. Certainly Ecuador is the land of cheap living; but unfortunately provisions cannot be obtained in all parts of the republic.

The Governor of Loja, Don Mariano Riofrio, behaved very kindly towards us, sending us many little things necessary for our comfort, lending us mules and horses to make excursions, and making us acquainted with all that he considered curious and interesting. He had a

great desire that we should visit the mines of Piscobamba, to obtain some notion of the riches of his province; but as the neighbourhood of Loja was a very profitable locality for making collections in Natural History, we did not consider it advisable that both of us should leave it; it was therefore agreed that Pim should proceed to Piscobamba, especially as Dr. R. Ekins, from whom we hoped to obtain some extensive information, was staying at that place.

“The Governor,” says my companion, “lent me a mule, and accompanied me himself some distance. After riding hard the whole day, I could not reach Piscobamba, and was obliged to put up at Vilacabamba, a little village containing about 150 inhabitants. The next morning, the *teniente* of the place, and some of his friends, went with me. The first part of the road was over pampas, covered with beautiful grass; we then entered the hot valley of Piscobamba, which had much the appearance of the deserts of Peru,—the change was most sudden; I also for the first time saw the snow-capped mountains of the Andes. In the afternoon I arrived at the hacienda where Dr. Ekins was stopping: he, as well as the proprietor of the farm, Don Jose Miguel, whom he was treating for paralysis, and to whom I had a letter of introduction, received me very kindly.

“During my stay at Piscobamba I was out all day visiting mines, or rather holes sunk in an inclined plane to a depth of about two hundred and fifty feet. The working had been stopped by water. I broke off some of the best specimens I could find—gold, silver, and copper. Report says that once these mines afforded considerable

revenues. I was also taken to an immense hole, which had been excavated at the expense of a company of merchants, in order to obtain a treasure supposed to have been buried in that spot. The story runs thus :—When Atahualpa, the last Inca of Peru, had become the prisoner of Pizarro, he sent Indians to the principal cities of his realm to collect the ransom that was demanded for his liberation. Those carrying part of the treasure, when they arrived at Piscobamba, on their way to the Spanish camp, hearing that their king had been murdered, buried their precious burden, to conceal it from the enemy. One of the Indians however confessed the proceeding to a Spanish priest, and with his assistance drew a chart, which, on being discovered a few years ago, gave rise to the formation of a company. The map enabled the association to pitch upon a spot which, from the number of jars, bones, and other remnants that were discovered, bore evidence that it had previously been overturned by the hands of man ; but after digging for a long time the funds became low, and the work had to be discontinued for want of capital.

“ On the 28th, early in the morning, I departed. My mule was laden with two pair of saddle-bags full of mineralogical, botanical, and zoological specimens. The Doctor and Don Jose Miguel, wishing to show me a silver-mine in the parish of Malacartos, went with me some distance, but by a different road from that by which I came : the mine, though much larger, was, like the others, a mere large hole. I had been told that I should reach Loja in good time. In spite of these assurances, evening overtook me when I was yet three

leagues distant, quite alone, ignorant which way to turn, and the mule sinking up to his belly in the mud. I had read of the sagacity of mules, so throwing the reins on the animal's neck, I let him follow his own road; he led me through the most out-of-the-way places, and about ten o'clock stopped before a gate. In Ecuador gates are differently made from those in England, consisting merely of two upright posts with large holes at regular distances, through which poles are inserted. Being extremely tired I did not get off, but took out as many of the poles as I could reach, and reined my animal back to take a leap, which he did right well; unfortunately my gun caught across the uprights, and took me out of the saddle; my foot was held fast in the stirrup, and I was regularly hung. The mule, after capering about a little, broke the stirrup-leather, and thus released me. I then walked a short distance, and came to a house, which proved to be the Governor's, and was the place where the mule had been foaled. The people, after some trouble, roused up one of the Indians, to guide me to the town. I arrived at Loja in about an hour; all the things were brought in the next day, and the only inconvenience I experienced was from a pain in the right shoulder, caused by a kick from the mule."