

CHAPTER XII.

Loja—Las Juntas—San Lucas—Saragura—Oña—Losing the way—
Cochopato—Navon.

THE town of Loja (Loxa), or, as it was formerly called, Zarza, is situated in the valley of Cujibamba, at the junction of the rivers Malacartos and Zamora, tributaries of the Amazon. It was founded in the year 1546, by Captain Antonio de Mercadillo, and soon rose to importance, partly owing to its favourable situation on the high road connecting Cuzco with Cuenca, Riobamba, and Quito, and partly by its trade in Quina and annual fair. But during the latter part of the Spanish domination it shared in the gradual decline of South America, and the political convulsions which followed gave it a severe blow, until it arrived at the state in which we found it—dull, decayed, and dirty. The principal streets run from south to north, and are crossed by others at right angles, thus dividing the town into regular squares; they are all paved, and streams of water run down the centre of each. The houses are one or two stories high, and built

of adobes. Most of the larger houses have balconies ; glass windows are not much seen, wooden shutters supplying their places. The dwellings are dirty and full of fleas and jiggers (*Pulex penetrans*, Linn.). The latter is a minute animal, which introduces itself into the softer parts of the body, especially the feet, where it grows most rapidly and deposits its eggs, and can only with difficulty be extracted ; nearly every day four or five of these intruders have to be taken out—an operation in which the natives have acquired considerable skill. In the centre of the town there is a large square, with a fountain in the middle, the sides consisting of the government offices, an unfinished church, a college, and several private buildings. Loja has seven churches, a nunnery (Concepcion),—containing at the time of our visit twenty-two nuns,—and a hospital. The treatment of the patients in the latter establishment is entrusted to women, who gather their remedies in the neighbourhood. The only medical man in Loja is Dr. Ekins ; but as he is mostly attending patients in different parts of the country, the inhabitants derive little benefit from his skill, and have to depend upon the vague knowledge of the virtues of plants and animals which tradition has handed down to them.

The climate of Loja and the whole valley of Cujibamba is very moist. The wet season commences in January and lasts until the end of April, and sometimes until the middle of May ; in June, July, and August there are heavy rains, accompanied by strong gales of wind ; from September to January there is generally fine weather,

but a really dry season it cannot be called,—occasional showers of rain fall even at that time of the year. The average annual temperature of Loja has not yet been ascertained; during our stay the thermometer stood generally, at six o'clock in the morning, at 50° Fahr., at two P.M. 65°, and at ten at night 58°; when the sun is south of the equator, some of the days are said to be very warm. Notwithstanding the damp climate, the inhabitants look remarkably healthy, and instances of longevity are not unfrequent, some people having arrived at the age of one hundred years.

The number of inhabitants is estimated at 5000, consisting of whites, Indians, and half-castes. They are good-natured and hospitable, but, like most races who have descended from the Spaniards or owe their civilization to them, they are indolent, dirty, licentious, and fond of gambling. The men are tall and well proportioned: in the streets they wear a straw-hat, and a cloak or a gay-coloured poncho; otherwise they are dressed in the European fashion. The women, although they have fine faces, are short and ill-shaped; they also dress more or less in our style, but they never wear caps or bonnets, and only when riding on horse-back Panama hats.

Smoking is practised by both sexes. The women use small paper cigaritas, which it is courtesy to present to them; however, as the softer sex in the other towns of Ecuador do not indulge in the same habit, they feel a certain reluctance to smoke before strangers, and some of the ladies endeavoured to persuade us that they only used tobacco on account of the damp

climate. Brandy is drunk in great quantities, and by all classes. At their reunions it is customary for a person to hold a glassful in his hand, and, bowing to another, to say, "Con Usted;" the person thus addressed, if he does not wish to give offence, answers, "Con mucho gusto," and empties his own glass: it is unnecessary to add the result of this proceeding. As a general rule, the women are not allowed to take their meals with the men, but have to eat in the kitchen; the Governor however, and a few others of the more civilized, have broken through this absurd custom. Morality is at a low ebb, in a great measure owing to the priests, whose charges for marriages, we were told, are exorbitant, compelling many people to live together without the marriage ceremony, or at least giving them a plausible pretext for doing so.

The inhabitants are employed in collecting Quina and in trading in that article, in manufacturing pillons and ponchos, and in cultivating wheat. Every year, in September, there is a great fair, which begins on the 8th of that month and lasts several weeks; it is visited by people from all parts of the country. As a prologue to it, there is a religious procession in honour of Nuestra Señora de la Feria, a female saint specially created for the occasion. On the 22nd of August, when "Our Lady" entered, the town was in a state of excitement. In the morning, a band, consisting of five drummers and three fifers, paraded through the streets to announce her advent. The houses in those parts of the town through which the saint was to pass were covered with curtains, carpets, bedclothes, etc., of the most diversified shapes

and colours, and the streets were strewed with flowers. A body of Indians, headed by the alcalde, preceded the party: many of them wore alligator-heads as masks, and all were performing hideous grimaces to their own music, and frequently taking draughts of *chicha*. This is a part of the old superstitions, which the politic Spaniards, in order to reconcile the natives, have allowed to be mixed up with the rites of the Roman Catholic religion.

The vegetation around Loja is most luxuriant. There are a great many bright and large flowers; tree-ferns are plentiful, and *Calceolarias*, *Fuchsias*, *Convolvulaceæ*, *Siphocampylos*, and some fine *Ericaceæ* are abundant. The Quina of Loja is celebrated, but there are at present only a few trees in the neighbourhood of the town, and in order to get the bark the people have to go some distance. It may be collected at any season, and an axe and a knife are the only implements required for that purpose. One man is able, in a favourable locality, to gather about an aroba daily; an aroba of the best sort, the Quina fina de Loja (*Cinchona Condaminea*, H. et B.), sells for about twelve shillings, the other kinds for much less. The Achira (*Canna discolor*, Lindl.) is a plant commonly cultivated for the sake of its tuberous roots, which are eaten, and look like camotes. Peas, beans, potatoes, bananas (*Musa sapientum*, Linn.), sweet potatoes, and wheat are grown in great quantities.

On the 1st of September we departed from Loja. We intended to leave early in the morning; unfortunately the men were so drunk that we were obliged to load the animals ourselves, and even then we had the great-

est difficulty in making the Indians accompany us. The weather was most unpromising—very rainy, with every prospect of its continuance. The road was most difficult to pass; the horses and mules, also a bull that carried one of our bags, were sinking up to their bellies in mud, and we did not escape without some tumbles. Not being able to reach a house, we had to bivouac in the woods, under a pouring rain, covered with mud from head to foot, and the ground a regular swamp; with a great deal of trouble we managed to get a cup of hot cocoa to keep out the cold, and, as may be supposed, we passed a most miserable night.

We started at daybreak with the same kind of roads, and every bone aching with rheumatic pains. About noon we crossed the river Las Juntas, on a bridge of Indian workmanship, made of trunks of trees strewn over with twigs and gravel, without any side-rail, and not more than about six feet in breadth; and we reached the tambo of the same name, two huts, where we ought to have slept the previous night. We got a meal of eggs and *chicha*, and pushed on for the village of San Lucas. At a short distance from Las Juntas, both the weather and the roads changed, becoming equally dry, and the scenery was most beautiful. As we were riding along we had the good fortune to meet the cura of San Lucas, who proved to be the brother of the hospitable *teniente* at Gonzanama, and treated us with equal kindness.

San Lucas we found to be an assemblage of Indian huts, and built on the side of a hill, the most tremendous we had yet had to pass: steps had been cut on its sides,

to assist the mules both in ascent and descent. Near the village there are the ruins of a Spanish town, which was destroyed by an invasion of the wild Indians of Zamora. The tree-fern is so plentiful around San Lucas that the people use the wood for the commonest purposes.

The next morning we started for Saragura, fifteen leagues from Loja. For nearly a league after leaving San Lucas the road was dry, but after that it became horrible; the hills were steep and covered with mud, obliging the beasts to put their fore feet together and slide down the best way they could. After many tumbles we arrived at Saragura, where we were kindly welcomed by the *teniente* of the place. He told us that the village contained 2000 inhabitants; it did not appear to us that there were so many, but the houses were very scattered, and covered a large space of ground. The church, both internally and externally, was the prettiest we had seen, and was kept clean and neat. The land around Saragura was in a high state of cultivation, and wheat abundant. The thermometer stood at 60° in the evening. The only white people living in the place were the priest, the *teniente*, and two or three merchants; the latter have a trade in cascarilla, but that article is of inferior quality, and not worth more than six or seven reals the aroba of 25 lbs.

After staying for the night at Saragura, we proceeded on our journey; fresh mules—much to our surprise—having arrived for us early in the morning. We were amused by the numerous cavalcades we passed, which were on their way to the fair at Loja: both men and women were jaded and covered with mud, the women ap-

pearing as hardy as the men. Only the wealthier people put up at a house during the night, the rest camping out in the fields.

A league from Saragura the vegetation became very scarce; the country had a rather arid appearance, and the hills were of the most fantastic shapes. At four o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at the village of Oña, five leagues from Saragura. The parish contains about 2000 inhabitants, but the village itself not more than one or two hundred; it possesses a good church, with a fine large house for the cura; the tambo is cheap and clean, the best we had seen. There are no mines in this district; cultivation is scarce, though there are corn-fields; the sowing time, as at Saragura, is in January, February, and even March, and the harvest in October.

On the 5th of September we left Oña. The morning was charming; while the valleys were still enveloped in the long shadows of the mountains, the lofty summits of the Cordillera were already gilded by the rising sun, and singularly contrasted with the deep azure of the sky. We felt all the beauties, and none of the inconveniences, of the tropics. The air was pure and refreshing, the landscape grand and bold, and around us lay fields cultivated with grain and fruit, which reminded us of our own happy climate, and for a moment made us forget that we were travelling in an equinoctial region.

Our animals being in high spirits, and the road hard and dry, we soon left our luggage-mules behind, and long before noon reached Cochopato, a small village. There we intended to await the arrival of the muleteers,

but when after a considerable time they did not make their appearance, we resolved to proceed without them to Navon, the next stopping-place. From Oña to Cochopato there had been only one road, and we had hitherto experienced no difficulty in following it; but now two presented themselves: the one led over plains, while the other, branching off to the left, wound along the mountains. Though entertaining no doubt that the first was the one we ought to follow, yet, in order to be quite certain, we rode up to an Indian shepherdess, and, pointing to the road which traversed the plains, asked her, "Is this the highway to Navon?" She nodded, and replied, "*Arì*"—a word which, as we afterwards learned, signifies "yes" in Quichua; but, as our question was put in Spanish, we expected an answer in the same language, and therefore very naturally mistook her *arì* for a corruption of *arriva* (up).

Fully convinced that we were following the right direction, we ascended the mountain road, traversed a dark-looking forest, and entered, after a few hours' ride, one of those extensive grassy plains, or *pampas*, so numerous in the Andes. For some time we went along the banks of a rivulet, then descended into a valley, and were soon surrounded by a number of hillocks. I was so much engaged in collecting specimens that I paid little attention to the road, but when my principal harvest was over, I began to look around, and was at once convinced that we were upon a mere track made by cattle. I was prevented from communicating this observation to my companion, as he had gone ahead, and was resting himself in a little valley. Not being within

speaking distance, I took my poncho, waving him to come back; he made similar signs in return, and I, satisfied that he had understood me, commenced retracing my steps. My former inattention to the road however proved very disadvantageous. In a short time I found myself among a grove of trees, where I remained a few minutes, in order to collect some specimens; but, seeing that I had mistaken the path, I turned back, and reached the stream along the banks of which we had come. This place I thought a very good one for awaiting my companion's return. I dismounted, and stopped about a quarter of an hour, but he did not appear. I hastened back to the valley where I had last seen him; it was deserted. I now thought he must have passed when I was among the groves, and therefore took the proper direction to Cochopato. I succeeded in following the rivulet for about two miles, when the stream took a sudden turn, and I stood before a number of small paths branching off into different directions. I first took the central, as the one most likely to lead to the village—it conducted me to a lagoon, whither the cattle repaired to water: I was obliged to return; and all the other paths terminated in similar obstacles—I either arrived at a swamp or came to a grove, amidst which the track was lost.

With riding to and fro I had become completely bewildered; all my attempts to discover the right path had failed. Twilight had commenced, and I was still wandering over the vast pampas, shivering with cold and exhausted with fatigue and hunger. I had lost all,—my companion, my guides, and my way. Suddenly a ray of hope burst upon me: in one of the paths I found

an article belonging to Pim's saddle; surely he could not be far distant. I called his name; I shouted. No reply followed,—only the echo imitating my voice. My rejoicing was speedily changed into apprehension. What could have become of him? Perhaps he had been slain by the hands of treacherous Indians, or been attacked by wild animals.

My companion had been equally unlucky. When I was making signs to him he imagined that I had lost something and was returning to search for it; but, finding that I remained rather too long, he went back to the rivulet, and probably passed it when I was hidden by the trees. A short time after, his horse shied, and made such violent jumps that one of the stirrups was carried away, the finding of which caused me so much apprehension. My companion, like myself, had lost his way, but fortunately observed in one of the valleys a hut, which with some difficulty he succeeded in reaching; he persuaded one of the inhabitants to serve him as a guide, and arrived without any accident at Navon. He repaired to the house of the cura, in hopes of finding there both myself and the muleteers. The latter he met with, but he learnt with surprise that nothing had been heard of me. The cura exhibited great anxiety, and informed my companion that the part of the sierra in which I had been lost was uninhabited, and rendered dangerous by the inroads of savage Indians. He at once despatched six natives, whom he loaded with provisions and directed to fire guns at elevated positions in order to attract my attention. He went still further: by his influence his brother and several other gentlemen of the place offered

to accompany my friend on the following morning to endeavour to discover traces of the lost traveller.

When darkness closed around me, I gave up all hopes of finding my way. I was more than 8000 feet above the sea, and felt both cold and hungry; but, seeing no prospect of remedying the evil, I determined to make the best of my situation. Tying my horse to a low shrub, I took the saddle as a pillow, the saddle-cloth as a mattress, and, throwing the poncho over me, delivered myself into the arms of Morpheus. I had just arrived at that state when the exhausted frame feels that sleep is approaching, when voices became audible. I listened in breathless anxiety: it was no deception; they came closer and closer, and at last I distinguished the bleating of a flock of sheep, intermingled with the notes of an Indian song. I was near a valley, and the sounds proceeded from below. I descended as quickly as the nature of the ground would permit, and in less than ten minutes stood amid the flock. The sheep were driven by two Indian girls, who, at my unexpected appearance, screamed and ran away. I followed one of them at full gallop, and succeeded in overtaking her; upon my inquiries she told me that I was not far from Cochopato, the place we had passed in the forenoon, and that Navon was more than four leagues distant.

Having now a substantial road before me, I moved on in a pleasant trot, and soon fell in with a young man who was carrying a bundle of wood. He informed me that he belonged to the village, and that his parents would be glad to receive me into their house. And so indeed it proved: both his father and mother showed

me every mark of attention, and while the one acted the entertaining host, the other performed the duties of a good housewife, and placed before me a supper, consisting of a roasted Guinea-pig, potatoes, and some excellent cream-cheese. Though it was late, yet my arrival soon spread through the village, and in a short time the room was crowded with visitors, who came to look at the stranger.

The landlord tried to persuade me to remain for the night, but to that proposal I could not consent. I had heard that the guides as well as Pim had passed the village, and knew that they would be anxious at not finding me at Navon; so having obtained a guide I started about midnight and reached the village at four o'clock in the morning. Our muleteers were at the *tambo*, and I learnt from them that my companion was sleeping in the house of the cura. I repaired thither, but a number of furious dogs prevented me from effecting an entrance. Having returned to the *tambo*, I wrapped a blanket around me, and was almost instantly asleep. I had hardly enjoyed rest more than half an hour when I felt a touch on my shoulder; I awoke—the companion of my travels stood once more before me. He had risen early in order to commence searching, and was agreeably surprised at finding me so soon.

Thus ended our lesson in Quichua, the cost of which, including all delays and expenses caused by it, amounted to nearly ten dollars. After that time both of us paid more attention to the language of the Incas: we noted down words and learned sentences, and before reaching Guayaquil we could at least so far make ourselves in-

telligible as to ask for the necessaries of life. Although now, from want of practice, we have forgotten many expressions, yet we still remember that *arì* means *yes*, and that from the confusion of *arì* and *arriva* serious consequences may ensue.