

CHAPTER XIV.

Guayaquil—Santa Elena—Solango—Manta—Monte Christi—Sua—
Esmeraldas—Tumaco—Bay of Choco—Arrival in Panama.

THE city of Guayaquil was formerly called Culanta, and, according to Herrera, its foundation was laid by the Adelantado Belalsar ; but in one of those rebellions of the Indians which succeeded the Conquest it was almost destroyed, and many Spaniards lost their lives. In 1537 however Captain Franzisco de Orellana commenced rebuilding it. The Buccaneers made several attacks upon the place, in one of which they succeeded in capturing it, and extorting a considerable sum for ransom. During the war of independence the city declared itself an independent state, and could only with difficulty be induced to join Colombia, the republic founded by Bolivar, and since split into Venezuela, Nueva Granada, and Ecuador. In recent times Guayaquil has always been a trouble to the head government of Ecuador ; the negroes and zamboes, of which the great mass of its population consists, are always ready for a revolution.

As Guayaquil is the chief port of the republic and has nearly always succeeded in upsetting the government of the State whenever it suited its purpose, the supreme power has contemplated opening the port of Esmeraldas, and thus avoid Guayaquil altogether; but the disadvantages that would attend the measure, and the inferiority of the port of Esmeraldas have hitherto prevented the execution of this plan, and it is probable that it never will be carried out.

Guayaquil has no buildings of architectural importance, —indeed few cities in Spanish America possess much interest in this respect. The churches are constructed in a light fantastic style, not unimposing by moonlight, but looking too much like structures of card-paper to please in the day-time; in the interior they are decorated in a tawdry manner, without taste or elegance. The streets, as usual in Spanish-built cities, are at right angles; but the plan, though regular, is not perfectly carried out, the area which the town occupies not being half built upon or inhabited. The chief object to admire is the fine Quay, or Marina, extending for a mile and a half along the banks of the river Guayaquil; it is sixty feet broad, coped with stone, and lined with a row of respectable and even splendid houses, which make a fine display from the water, especially in the evening, when the rooms are lighted up. In the morning an immense number of canoes and boats, loaded with fruit, anchor off the Quay, and one knows not which to admire most, the great variety of these productions or the high state of perfection in which they are presented.

The city numbers 18,000 inhabitants; they are in

much the same state as those of France and England are described to have been during the reigns of Louis XIV. and Charles II. We were always struck, when visiting these towns, by the resemblance which they bear to those of bygone days, of which we read as of another world, hardly supposing there could be anything like them at present. In Guayaquil there are all the inconveniences arising from filthy open drains, gutters in the middle of the streets, and young ladies—beautiful in person, though not in deed—pouring out of a window something, whether an abomination or otherwise, while the unfortunate wayfarer is looking about in unconscious wonder at the strange scene, until the reverie is disturbed by the streaming shower, neither pure nor limpid. Gay, in his ‘*Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London,*’ written about a hundred and twenty years ago, gives a fair idea of what Lima and Guayaquil are at the present day; a description of Paris in the time of the Regency or of Louis XV. is still more appropriate.

There is some fine land near the town, which, from its flatness and the number of cattle grazing, looks much like the fen country in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. There are however some hills and some of the highest mountains in the world in the vicinity of this half-submerged district. To the north of Guayaquil stand three hills, known as the “*Cross Hills,*” there being a cross on the brow of each; the eastern hill is 247 feet above the sea, the middle 326, and the western 284: tradition points them out as having been the site of a city in the time of the Incas. One clear afternoon we had a good view of Chimborazo—*El lindo Chimborazo*, as the

Guayaquilenians call it. The mountain, though upwards of one hundred miles distant, was a grand sight, more striking even than Mount Etna or the Peak of Teneriffe. Chimborazo is a huge irregular double-peaked mass more than 21,000 feet high, and, as the limit of perpetual snow on the equator is 15,000 feet, its height above that elevation will be clad for ever with an icy garment.

The river Guayaquil is a noble stream; at the island of Puna it is eight or nine miles broad, and off the city there are six fathoms of water; at high tide a line-of-battle ship might ascend it, even without the aid of steam. True there are in its bed awkward flats and several rocks which are difficult to pass, but the survey made by Captain Kellett will enable vessels to guard against them. In ascending, the wind is generally fair from south-south-west, but in descending, having to beat down, the difficulty of avoiding the shoals is considerable. This river reminds one of the Thames,—that is, as far as tropical scenery can remind one of that of more temperate climates. Puna, the large island at the mouth, might stand for Sheppey, the terrible mud-flats mentioned for those off Grain Island and in the reaches of the Medway; there is also a false river nearly as large as the main stream, which may carry out a fair resemblance to the Medway, though it is in fact no river, but merely a *salado*, as the Spanish term it,—a salt creek or estuary. In one of the revolutions to which Ecuador has been subjected, General Flores landed a force from this creek and took Guayaquil. The march was said to have been a terrible one, over the half-submerged roots of the mangrove-trees; “but,” says Mr. Henry Trollope in his

diary, "Mr. Hull and myself went up to the head of the creek in the 'whaler,' and walked in ten minutes by a capital path to an open space, where we had a full view of the city, and were within a quarter of a mile of the nearest church."

The banks of the *salado*, as well as those of the river Guayaquil, are lined with impenetrable mangrove-swamps; there is hardly a spot on which landing is possible. Punta Piedra, about fifteen miles from Puna, is one of the places where a person may venture to step on firm ground; it was formerly the site of a fort, the ruins of which are still to be found; its epithet, *stony*, or *rocky*, it deserves only by comparison. Ycasa, the estate of a Doña Josefina, is another of the spots which one gladly hails after looking so many days on the interminable mangrove-forest. Prescott, in his 'History of the Conquest of Peru,' draws a charming picture of the entry of the followers of Pizarro and Almagro into "the beautiful Gulf of Guayaquil." But a more unpromising sight—barring the desert—is seldom to be met with, than the swampy shores of this gulf. The tangled underwood, the long roots, and the dense foliage, are all that the eye perceives, and how much that is in a flat country may be easily imagined. Alligators swarm on the mud-banks at low water, and it is difficult to disturb them. They smell abominably; the inhabitants imagine that, like the turkey-buzzards of these countries, and the dogs of Constantinople, they act as scavengers, and tend to keep down the mass of corruption which would otherwise accumulate.

We must now return to the Herald. That vessel,

after leaving Payta in July, proceeded northwards, and, during the months of August and September, was employed surveying the river Guayaquil, from the island of Puna to the city of Guayaquil, and also the Salado and Mandragon, two channels accessible for the largest ships. On the 29th of September she anchored in Punta Santa Elena Bay, to re-survey it, and to complete the Gulf of Guayaquil, of which Santa Elena is the northern boundary. When Pim and myself reached Guayaquil the Herald had departed, and we had to remain in the city until Lieutenant Wood arrived, informing us that the Pandora was at Punta Español, Island of Puna, and was ready to take us to our ship. We left without delay, and rejoined the Herald at Punta Santa Elena.

On the 6th of October, during the night, the Herald and Pandora proceeded up the coast, and on the 7th anchored off Salango Island, which, possessing an extremely moist climate, bears a most luxuriant vegetation. We found but few inhabitants; they employ themselves in plaiting Panama hats, for the hats known by this name are not all made in the Isthmus of Panama,—by far the greater number, and those of the best quality, are manufactured in Manta, Monte Christi, and other parts of Ecuador. The hats are worn throughout nearly the whole American continent and the West Indies, and would probably be equally used in Europe, did not their high price, varying from two to a hundred and fifty dollars, prevent their importation. They are distinguished from other straw hats by consisting only of a single piece, by their lightness, and by their flexibility; they may be rolled up and put into the pocket without injury. During

the rainy season they are apt to get black, but by washing them with soap and water, then with lime-juice or any other acid, and exposing them to the sun, their whiteness is easily restored. So little is known about these hats that it may not be deemed out of place to insert here a notice of their manufacture. The plant, the leaves of which are used for this purpose, is commonly called "Jipijape" or "Portorico," and by botanists *Carludovica palmata*, Ruiz et Pav. It has the appearance of a palm, and is found along the western shores of Nueva Granada and Ecuador, extending over twelve degrees of latitude. The "straw" (*paja*), previous to plaiting, undergoes several processes. The leaves are gathered before they unfold, all their ribs and coarser veins removed, and the rest, without being separated from the upper end of the leaf-stalk, is reduced to shreds; after exposure to the sun for a day, the straw is tied into a knot, and immersed in boiling water until it becomes white; it is then hung up in a shady place, and subsequently bleached for several days. The straw is now ready for use, and in this state is sent to various places, especially to Peru, where the Indians manufacture it into beautiful cigar-cases, which sometimes fetch as much as £6 a-piece. The hats are made on a block placed on the knees, and they require to be constantly pressed with the breast. The plaiting is troublesome; it commences at the crown and finishes at the brim. According to the quality, more or less time is occupied in their completion: the coarser ones may be finished in two or three days, the finest take as many months. The best times for plaiting are when the atmosphere is moist, as in the

rainy season and the morning hours; in dry weather, and in the middle of the day, the straw is apt to break, which, when the hats are finished, is betrayed by knots, and diminishes their value.

The most remarkable features of the coast of Ecuador are the sudden changes in the aspect and climate of the country; places separated but a few miles differ widely from each other. At Guayaquil there are mangrove-swamps and impenetrable thickets; at Santa Elena aridity and a scanty vegetation; at Salango an atmosphere loaded with moisture, abundance of rain, and a soil densely covered with plants; at Manta a desert; and in the Bay of Atacamas again thick forests and plenty of rain. A graphic picture might be drawn of the western coast of America; there are all the contrasts a writer could wish for,—the inclement weather of the Polar seas, regions scorched by the sun, groves of beautiful timber, and arid deserts; the gloomy climate of Choco, and the bright sunny days of Lower California; the palm and the pine; the alligator and the walrus; free-men and slaves; negroes and whites.

On the 10th of October we anchored off Manta, and on the 13th a party went to Monte Christi, of which the former is the seaport. We passed the village of Colorado, a mere collection of huts, and had a very dusty ride. Monte Christi, a portion of which had been burnt down on the day of our arrival in the port, is built of bamboos; it is said to have 3000 inhabitants, but I should think that estimate too high. The surrounding country is a mere desert, and, except Indian corn and cassava, nothing is cultivated. The rainy season lasts from

December until the middle of March ; after that time pasturage is so scarce that the cattle have to be fed on the bark of a tree (*Pachira* sp.) and some epiphytal *Bromeliaceæ*. Even the Jipijapa, the leaves of which are used by the inhabitants for making hats, does not flourish. All the vegetation we saw consisted of shrubby cotton-plants, a few cactuses, the Zapote de perro (*Colicodendron scabridum*, Seem.), and some Crotons.

On the 16th we left Manta, and, after visiting Punta Galena, directed our course to the Sua river, where we arrived on the 18th. Most of us paid a visit to the grave of Thomas Edmonston. The luxuriant vegetation had spread a verdant mantle over the tomb, and surrounded it with brilliant flowers. It was to all a sad recollection ; many an expression of pity was uttered, and Mr. J. G. Whiffin, who was present on the occurrence of the accident which deprived poor Edmonston of his life, penned the following Acrostic :—

'T was from this beautiful and rock-bound bay
 Heaven deem'd it right to call his soul away ;
 One moment's warning was to him denied ;
 'Midst life, and youth, and health, and hope he died.
 A las ! that boastful Science could not save
 So apt a scholar from his early grave.

Even those who knew not of his private worth
 D epl ore his talents buried in the earth.
 'M ong flowers that gem the softly verdant ground,
 O 'erspread with trees his grave is to be found
 N o crowd his resting-place shall ever view ;
 S till sad affection will induce a few
 T o gaze where plants o'er which he lavish'd years,
 O 'er him, now silent, shed their dewy tears,
 N or seek to hide a grief denied to nobler biers.

At the village of Sua, about a mile inland, there are extensive plantations of sugar-cane, for manufacturing *aguardiente*. Tobacco is grown on a large scale, and smuggled into Nueva Granada, where that article is a government monopoly, and fetches a high price; oranges are abundant, and excellent in flavour; pinc-apples, with leaves without spines, are cultivated on the sea-beach in great numbers.

On the 23rd we reached the mouth of the Esmeraldas. This river takes its rise in the Andes, and, although of considerable size, is full of shoals, and unfit for sea-going vessels. About six miles from its mouth is the town of Esmeraldas, a place containing about 4000 inhabitants, mostly negroes and zamboes. There are mines of emeralds in the vicinity, formerly worked by the Jesuits; but since the expulsion of that Order this branch of industry has been neglected; the popular belief is, that the places where the precious stones are to be found are haunted by evil spirits, which will probably continue to reside there until the Jesuits shall again establish their sway over the country.

On the 25th we set sail, and on the following day anchored off the island of Tumaco, where we proceeded to survey the river and bay of the same name. Our operations were much hindered by the rain, and excursions on shore were attended with difficulty, the ground being in many places a perfect swamp, and in others quite inundated, compelling us to wade through the water. On the island of Morro we obtained some excellent oysters for our table, and added a fine species of *Pholas* to our conchological collection. The town of Tumaco is a mere

village, with unpaved streets and houses of bamboo; it is well supplied with fruit, and exports timber, chiefly mangrove and cedro.

On the 3rd of November we visited the island of Gorgona, and two days after anchored off the Buenaventura, Bay of Choco, to finish the survey. This bay is probably the most rainy place on the globe, and its vegetation the most luxuriant that can be conceived. Our task being finished, we departed on the 10th, and, meeting with strong westerly breezes, reached on the 14th the island of Flaminco in the Bay of Panama, where we received despatches, letters, and newspapers from England.