

TRAVELS

IN THE

REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA.

CHAPTER I.

Departure from France—The Azores—Coasts of the United States—Norfolk—Washington—New Carthagena—Departure for Bogota—Turbaco—Barranca—Route from Carthagena to the Magdalena.

THE sanguinary struggle in which Spanish America was engaged, and the surprising revolution which had taken place there, opening as it did to foreigners the long-closed ports of that continent, had excited my curiosity in the highest degree. Longing to satisfy it, I eagerly embraced the first opportunity which presented itself; a ship of war being on the point of sailing to the Antilles for the protection of our commerce, I solicited permission to embark on board her; my request was granted.

I lost no time in making the necessary preparations, and, upon arriving at the place of embarkation, was informed that the vessel would first touch at the United States; information

which, far from being disagreeable, was particularly gratifying, as it would procure me the means of visiting both Americas.

After some unforeseen delays, we set sail in the month of August, 1822. On the 1st of September we came in sight of the Azores; passed St. Michael; and, early the next day, saw Terceiras, St. George, and Pico. An American whaler was the only vessel we met with in these latitudes.

Our passage was on the whole favourable, and would have been completely so, but for the fogs on the coast of North America, which prevented our seamen from taking observations sufficiently exact to remove all uncertainty. At length, on the 26th, at six o'clock in the evening, an American pilot comforted us with the assurance that we were not far from land; and, the next day, we descried the sandy coasts of Virginia covered with forests of pines. At one o'clock in the afternoon we anchored at a short distance from the fort of Hampton, now called, after the president, Fort Monroe.

Before the arrival of a boat to carry me to Norfolk, which is about four leagues to the south-east of Hampton, I had an opportunity of examining the novel spectacle which surrounded me; and saw, with particular interest, the fort raised in the middle of the bay to defend the entrance to the Chesapeake, by which the English,

in 1814, penetrated as far as Washington. This fort requires three hundred pieces of artillery.

It was not till the evening of the 28th, that I could procure, for my passage to Norfolk, one of those pilot-boats, so light, but at the same time so dangerous, in which the helmsman is obliged to confine himself within a narrow hole to prevent his being washed away by the billows which continually break over his frail bark ; the numerous tacks we were compelled to make prevented our arriving at the town till midnight. Norfolk is very advantageously situated for commerce, from its short distance from Chesapeake Bay, into which so many rivers discharge themselves. The streets of Norfolk, as in all towns of English construction, are wide, and furnished with *trottoirs*. The houses are of brick ; while the variety of their structure, and the neatness prevailing in their interiors, impart an air of cheerfulness to Norfolk which renders it very interesting to foreigners.

Upon seeing the grass plots which surround each habitation, and the trees which overshadow its roof, the traveller would be tempted to imagine himself in the midst of the country, did not the confusion caused by numerous carriages of all descriptions, and the bustle of the port, which hundreds of boats and vessels are crossing in every direction, announce that Norfolk is a commercial town of considerable importance.

On the 30th of September, I left this place for Washington; and, after sailing on the Chesapeake till midnight, entered the Potowmack.

At daybreak, we were between the coasts of Maryland and those of Virginia. The heat was great; but little cultivation was visible: the lands were yet maiden ones. Notwithstanding the cheap rate at which the government disposes of them 50 francs an acre,* the system of slavery kept up in these provinces deters the colonists, who prefer passing the Allegany Mountains, and establishing themselves in the west, where they find land at 5 francs an acre.† About one o'clock we discovered Mount Vernon, the residence of Washington; although its architecture is simple, what interesting recollections does it bring to mind!

Leaving on our right the mouth of the Piscataway, near which is a fort destined one day to defend the capital from the torches of the English, we came in sight of Alexandria, a town flourishing during the time of war, but now in a declining state. Its streets, laid down geometrically, are all perpendicular to the river, which produces a singular effect; for on one side, it is bordered by woods of pine, and on the other by forests of masts. From Alexandria we perceived the wooden bridge of Washington,

* About 38s. English.

† About 3s. 9d. English.

which is a mile in extent; and soon after, the city itself appeared in the midst of cultivated fields, occupying almost the whole extent allotted to it.

Washington is a city of prodigious extent, with reference to the plan after which it has been built; but, except at the meeting of Congress, it is but a melancholy solitude, in which it is impossible to escape from *eunui*. This is the only time it has the appearance of being inhabited; and the few country-houses scattered about its vicinity are filled with strangers, whose presence imparts some degree of animation to the city. At the time I was there, the number of inhabitants was very small; so much so, that I considered I had seen the whole city the very first day even of my arrival. I shall not here repeat the description of its public monuments, as they are to be found in almost every account of voyages to the United States. The next day I embarked upon the Potowmack to return to Norfolk, and was twenty-four hours in performing the sixty leagues, which separate the two towns.

Our vessel was to re-victual at Norfolk, and for this a few days only were requisite. On the 13th of November we again weighed anchor; the wind, which, at first favourable, had carried us out of the roads, and enabled us to double Cape Henry, suddenly became contrary, and obliged us to anchor opposite that point. The delay, however, was not long; the

next day we again set sail, and before sun-set lost sight of the coasts of North America.

Upon arriving in a country to which we are strangers, every one communicates the information he has acquired from the relations of travellers, while the accounts of persons who have already visited it are listened to with peculiar interest. Upon quitting it, they who at first, from ignorance, had paid implicit deference to the accounts of their precursors, and had confined themselves to being mere auditors, hasten to avail themselves of their newly-acquired experience, and feel a malicious gratification in contradicting what they themselves had adopted in the first instance, as the result of mature reflection. Thus it was with each of us; we were eager mutually to communicate our remarks, and to make our comments upon them: many institutions which seemed inconsistent with the principle upon which the social edifice of the United States had been founded, struck us with astonishment. The lash under which the negro-slaves still smart cracked in our ears*; the prejudices under which men of colour groaned, shocked our sensibility; morals appeared relaxed, which indeed they must have been to a great degree to have provoked the censure of sailors, naturally not inclined to be severe in

* In 1820, the number of slaves in the United States amounted to 1,588,128.

these matters. The police, which, while it allows great liberty to foreigners, affords them but little security against the bad faith of traders, or the treachery of domestics, allowed but little room for admiration. Above all, great complaints were made of the remissness of the Americans in adopting precautionary measures against the yellow fever, thus exposing all the towns upon the coast to its annual ravages. On the other hand, it was impossible not to praise the activity of their commerce, the good order of their marine, the eagerness with which they avail themselves of all new inventions, and particularly of steam-engines, which have become for them, as well as for every nation that employs them, a great and incalculable means of riches and power. Many persons, especially among the military, were thought to have a leaning towards aristocracy; and indeed, some recent institutions, such as the establishment of a school for the officers at New York, prove that the government, far from discountenancing, encourage it. In short, a great source of division might be foreseen in the population of colour which peoples the southern provinces, while those of the north contain comparatively but few, who oppose, to the utmost of their power, the system of their southern neighbours. In general, the opinions thus given of countries which we had only in fact just perceived, were marked by

impartiality; it was agreed that the manners of the inhabitants of Virginia might be very different from those of Pennsylvania, and that the system of slavery imparted so peculiar a physiognomy to the regions of the south, that it was difficult to recognize the traits of the English character,—I mean of that creative activity which operates miracles in so many places.

The towns had appeared dull and the country monotonous from the forests of pine by which it was covered, and the roads inconvenient from being formed of beams as in Russia. The climate of Norfolk was found to be too warm, that of Washington too cold and damp. We were generally pleased with the neatness and simplicity observable in the interior of the houses, and still more gratified by the kindness and hospitality of the inhabitants. These virtues of which they possessed a great share, were rendered more amiable among the women from the charm of sincerity.—The men generally preserved the characteristic taciturnity of the English.

The winds and the waves were so favorable, that we daily made great way. The pleasure we felt at soon arriving in the equinoctial seas contributed much to enliven our conversations; but a sudden change of the wind damped our joy, and caused our hope of making a quick and agreeable passage to be succeeded by all the disagreeableness of a tedious voyage. In short

we were becalmed near the Bermudas. In vain we sought for something to relieve the weary uniformity of the motionless ocean; in vain, our eyes fixed on the horizon, did we endeavour to discover some movement on the liquid plain; all was still. At length some fish made their appearance, and the pleasure of catching them was doubled by the hope that they were the precursors of winds. Their arrival was not a fallacious prognostic; on the 24th of October, a breeze from the south south-west relieved us from our unpleasant position, and carried us as far the 31° of latitude and 62° of longitude. We did not however cross the tropic until the 3rd of November. On the 8th we perceived Porto Rico, and found ourselves in latitude $14^{\circ} 52'$; the next day we sailed in sight of the small islands of Zacheo, Mona and Monito. These isolated rocks, covered with brush-wood, and bind-weed, appear inaccessible; before nightfall they were no longer in sight: we had entered the sea of the Antilles. Two days afterwards upon seeing land, we sounded, and found bottom at forty five fathoms. Having afterwards arrived in latitude $11^{\circ} 18'$, we fell in with the Columbian fleet, dispatched to form the blockade of Maracaïbo, which had fallen into the possession of the Spanish general Morales.

The captain was not without anxiety as he approached land. The little depth which the

sounding line every where indicated, the variation of the currents, the storms which burst over us daily, and the dangerous coasts sufficiently justified his apprehensions, these were, however, considerably lessened upon seeing, on the 15th, the point of Zamba, a promontory formed by ten unequal mounds. At length on the 17th, we perceived the convent built upon the Popa; Carthagenia is at the foot of this height. The next day we weighed anchor early and sailed for the port; we soon passed Boca-Grande, a canal which the Spaniards the better to defend the approaches to Carthagenia, have blocked up by sinking old vessels in it; a few moments after we entered the passage of Boca-Chica, which is defended by two strong castles. An officer sent by the commandant of one of the castles came on board, we then hoisted all sails, and entered the magnificent port of Carthagenia about five o'clock in the evening.

The vessel was not long in resuming her voyage, and I had to feel the regret of separating from those persons whose amiable society had so agreeably lessened the tediousness of the passage.

The hope of soon penetrating into the Cordilleras, by reviving my taste for land travelling, had determined me not to proceed any further by sea; I remained at Carthagenia.

Upon arriving in the town, I had to guard against those favourable prepossessions which are

almost always indulged, when coming from off the ocean : all then appears beautiful ; the least verdure seems a parterre ; a miserable hut a palace, and any land a paradise. I, on the contrary, experienced a very different impression, and the comparison which I drew between Norfolk and Carthagena, was by no means favourable to the towns of South America. Carthagena in fact presents the melancholy aspect of a cloister, long galleries, short and clumsy columns, streets narrow and dark, from the too great projection of the terraces which almost prevent the admission of day-light ; the greater part of the houses dirty, full of smoke, poverty stricken, and sheltering beings still more filthy, black and miserable, such is the picture at first presented by a city adorned with the name of the rival of Rome. However, on entering the houses, their construction, singular at first sight, appears afterwards to be well contrived, the object being to admit the circulation of the fresh air. The rooms are nothing but immense vestibules in which the cool air, unfortunately so rare, might be respired with the utmost delight, were it not for the stings of thousands of insects, and for the bats whose poisonous bites are not only more painful, but are even said to be venomous. A table, half-a-dozen wooden chairs, a mat bed, a large jar, and two candlesticks generally compose the whole stock of furniture

of these habitations, which are built of brick and covered in with tiles. Two sieges, which Carthagera has undergone, have ruined the resources of the majority of its inhabitants.

Carthagera is very strong, and of vast extent; 9000 men at least would be required to defend it at all points. The immense cisterns contained within its walls are justly objects of admiration; and the water preserved in them is excellent. Carthagera is therefore rather a fortified than a commercial town, and will entirely cease to be the latter, when it is no longer the entrepot of Panama. At a distance of two hundred leagues from the equator, its temperature is hot and unhealthy, and the yellow fever makes frequent ravages there.

The population of Carthagera, about 18,000 souls, is for the most part, composed of people of colour, the greater proportion of whom are sailors or fishermen. Many keep shops for the sale of mercery or catables, others follow useful trades; they display a nascent industry, which, to prosper, perhaps only requires encouragement and emulation. Their shell-works are beautiful, they are skilful jewellers, good carpenters, excellent shoemakers, tolerable tailors, indifferent joiners, black rather than whitesmiths, masons destitute of all ideas of proportion, and bad painters, but impassioned musicians.

The dangers of the sea, an industry often

praised, and always well paid, have inspired the people of colour with a pride, which often gives occasion for complaint. Their petulance and vivacity form a singular contrast with the indifference and mildness of those who are called whites, so that, notwithstanding their idleness, they appear active and laborious. The contraband trade is exclusively confined to them, and the heartiness with which they engage in it, is a reproach to those whose duty it is to put a stop to the illicit traffic.

The women of colour, the offspring of negroes and white men, are tall, and much more agreeable than the mulattos of our Antilles who are generally too corpulent; daughters of the Indians and negroes, their physiognomy possesses greater delicacy and expression. If, on the one hand, the races become more enervated under the tropics as they become fairer, on the other, their personal appearance is improved; thus it is, that the female mulattos are very inferior in beauty to the white, and lose much when seen near them, which often happens with the Spaniards, in whose churches there are no privileged places as in those of the United-States. With the Spaniards, all pray to God in common, without regard to colour, and an insurrection would doubtless be the consequence, should the following notice be officially affixed at the church doors: *To day instruction for men of colour.*

On the 1st of January, 1823, I prepared for my departure to Santa-Fé de Bogota. The alarm every where inspired by the proximity of Morales, at that time master of Maracaïbo, had prevented my setting out earlier. As soon as I was assured that the Spanish general was not approaching Rio-Magdalena, I applied to the governor for horses. This officer sent in search for them in every direction. As the army of Montillo, the patriotic chief, was being remounted, the country people kept their animals concealed in the woods, in order to escape the requisitions; some however, were at length discovered, and notwithstanding the well founded complaints of their owners, were brought to me harrassed, and worn out with hunger and fatigue. In the mean time, while trusting too much to my muleteer, I was engaged in preparing for my journey, the poor beasts were tied up in a courtyard, where they remained three whole days without a blade of grass to support nature, so that, when unconscious of their wants, I began my journey, I met with continual interruptions from the wretched animals dying every instant upon the road from exhaustion. The heat was most intense, and we were with difficulty making our way through the woods, when I heard a voice behind me exclaim in French: *Monsieur, où allez-vous!* The question and the language in which it was expressed, made me turn my head, and I saw

a young man spurring on his horse in order to overtake me : after having answered his question, he anticipated my enquiries, by informing me that he was born at St. Etienne en Forest, that he was by trade a gunsmith, and had come to Columbia with the hope of making his fortune, but all his calculations had proved erroneous. After mentioning some other particulars, he proposed accompanying me ; I willingly accepted his offer, and had no reason to regret doing so ; for perceiving how much I was plagued with my horses, he rendered me considerable service, both by assisting the muleteer and urging on the horses which lagged behind. We passed by Ternera, and conversing as we proceeded, upon the robberies committed a short time before upon this road by deserters, arrived safely at Turbaco, much fatigued with our first day's journey.

A letter of recommendation which the intendant at Carthagena had given me to all the alcaides, insured me a good reception at Turbaco, the alcaid procured me a lodging at the house of one of the principal citizens ; he was a painter, a title uniformly assumed by the daubers of that country ; my host however shewed me a thousand civilities.

According to the travelling custom of Spanish Americans, I had provided myself with a kettle, a frying-pan, and all the utensil and provisions not procurable on the road. I

had also one of those beds brought from Spain, generally esteemed so very convenient from their being contained in a small trunk, easily carried by the beast of burden. I therefore caused my host but little trouble; my bed was spread out in one of the best rooms of the house. All night long, I felt it very cool, a proof that this place is very healthy for Europeans, who, from fear of the climate of Carthagena, should remain here till their vessels are ready to sail. Turbaco is only six leagues from Carthagena, which renders a residence in this village doubly agreeable from the facility afforded of being quickly in the centre of business.

I left Turbaco the next day, the alcade had procured me two saddle-horses, in lieu of the wretched beasts of the preceding day. Notwithstanding the excessive heat, we arrived at an early hour at Ajona; I presented myself at the alcades, the only attention I received was an order for lodging upon one of his subordinates. When I asked the alcade to procure horses, he replied, that it was impossible before the following day; this was a very great disappointment.

My host, to whom I mentioned my embarrassment instantly dispatched some of his people into the country, and before four o'clock my baggage was all loaded. A glass of rum testified my gratitude to this worthy man, and I perceived that among the christians of America,

both services and gratitude are obtained with this liquor, as they are among the Mahometan negroes of Africa, by tobacco. Night soon surprised us, and our progress was very uncertain. After having wandered a long time in the woods, the assistance of a beautiful moonlight enabled us to recover our track; and, at nine o'clock at night, we were on the banks of the Dique, a branch of the Magdalena, by which Cartagena is approached in the rainy season. When I crossed it, its waters were very low, and yet reached to our saddles. Neither bridge nor ferry had yet been established on this canal, although these are to be found in other places far less difficult; the traveller has, however, less to complain of the inconvenience of the ford, than of the musquitoes which infest it. It is in vain to hasten from these desolate shores. these formidable insects are again met with at Mahates, a village containing about two hundred inhabitants, where to sleep is absolutely impossible. We both rose before day-break, in order to leave as quickly as possible this place of suffering; and, at seven o'clock, passed through Santa Cruz, about three leagues farther on: this village is composed of twenty huts belonging to negroes, who are cultivators of cotton. It is singular, that the negroes, who have brought into America so many customs, and even utensils and instruments belonging to the countries whence they

were taken, have no where given a round form to their *ajoupas*, which are all square.

At Ariando, the alcaid received us in his hut, constructed with hurdles of rushes, and plastered over with mud mixed with straw.

Near this place, we met a government courier, the bearer of an order to the governor of Carthagena, for the transportation of three hundred Spaniards. This man was very angry at my muleteer, who, speaking of the capital, had said Santa Fé, instead of Bogota. Fortunately, however, the quarrel here ended. We discovered Barranca from the top of the coast on the declivity of which this town is built. I lodged there at the house of an old Peruvian, whose services in the cause of liberty had been so important, that he flattered himself with obtaining the situation of director of the posts at Carthagena, the emoluments of which amount to 10,000 francs.*

Although on the road from Carthagena to Barranca, there are neither rugged mountains to climb, nor deep rivers to cross, yet the suffocating heat, and the thin and burning air respired in the forests he has to traverse, cause much suffering to the European traveller. It is true, that, to make up for these evils, he is sure to meet with hospitality; nor is it a trifling advantage to find, in the deserts of the New World, a

* About £375 sterling.

lodging, a kitchen, and the power of procuring, at a small expense, fowls, eggs, and bread; beef is very seldom to be met with. With a few exceptions, I had very little reason to be satisfied with the alcalds.

The aspect of these countries is interesting for the admirers of wild and savage scenery. Trees of immense height, and a healthy vegetation, cover the whole country; and the shade thus afforded would be delicious, could it be penetrated by the cool zephyrs. The mahagua (bombax) is especially worthy of engaging the traveller's attention: the trunk of this tree is very lofty, and bears upon its top a foliage extremely thick. The fruit contains a woolly substance, which the negroes gather very carefully for the purpose of stuffing their pillows.

But few things have been planted on these vast tracts by the hand of man; a few cotton and mace fields, a few feet of indigo, compose the whole of their agricultural riches. Under a kind master, the negro, who with the mulatto is the most frequently met with, gives himself up to the idleness, to which he is invited by the heat of the equinoctial line, and the multiplicity of his religious festivals. Bound to pay his landlord a fixed and moderate rent, he is punctual in discharging it, as much labour is not required to obtain its amount. Thus, in the space which separates Barranca from the seas, a territory is found,

which is cultivated and inhabited similarly to those which I had traversed in Africa ; I should even have been sometimes tempted to believe that I was still travelling upon that continent, had I not every where seen the authority in the hands of the whites, or of people who affect that title, without possessing any real right to it. The road, although convenient enough, is not very level ; the ground is hilly, so that the traveller is frequently ascending and descending. As this road is, during the dry season, the principal line of communication between the capital and the coast, its traffic is considerable ; yet notwithstanding, no rich towns are to be met with ; there are a few cattle, but in this season they are very poor. All animals in the tropical plains, like the plants, require the rains to invigorate them ; these being over, they again droop and languish.

Jaguars, monkeys, and parrots, make the air re-echo with their cries ; and vast numbers of stags and wild hogs people the woods.

Nothing picturesque is to be found in these extensive forests, the dull uniformity of which is only now and then varied by numerous tribes of flowers. Upon approaching the Magdalena, the prospect becomes more inviting ; the long tracts of granite (grès) which impart such a sombre character to the road from Carthageua to Barranca disappear ; alluvial lands seem to

invite the inhabitants to bestow a better cultivation upon them ; the verdure, more frequently watered, is less sickly ; while the cattle feeding upon more juicy pastures, are fatter and more prolific.

Barranca, the town at which travellers ascending the Magdalena, embark in the dry season, is thinly peopled, notwithstanding its agreeable situation. If the heat is very intense there during the day, the breeze which occasionally rises, refreshes the atmosphere ; nor is this its only advantage, it likewise drives towards the head of the river the immense clouds of musquitoes, from which Barranca is consequently freed. The importance which this place at present enjoys, on account of the *piraguas*,* and the asses let out to travellers, will cease as soon as the Dique is rendered navigable at all seasons ; a design intended to be carried into execution.

* The *piragua* is a large canoe, managed with oars, about 30 feet long and 4 broad in the middle. Each *piragua* has two masts and two square sails. The rowers are called *Bogas*.—*Translator*.