

## CHAPTER X.

Return to Bogota—Pucute Real—Copper mines of Moniquira—Chiquiquira—Salt mines of Zipaquira.

AFTER making a stay of five days in the capital of Socorro, I resumed my route to Bogota, and at an early hour traversed the pleasant village of Las Palmas. Following at a distance the lofty chain of Opon, upon which many habitations may be perceived, we had to cross a bridge; here a toll of 3 sous was to be paid, from which however I was exempted by the address of a native with whom I was travelling, and who, unknown to me, passed me off as an officer of the republic; a title which supersedes all payment: such an abuse is however ill calculated for the encouragement of useful enterprises. The bridges in the province of Socorro, are of a very simple construction, and for their preservation are covered in with a tiled roof.

In the evening I entered Guadalupe, this village is situated on a plateau already elevated, as indicated by the thermometer which was only at 15°. This change is also, in a great measure, owing to the storms which continually rage here; the air is sharper; no goitres are to be seen. The next day, we descended upon the unhealthy banks of the Suarez; as, at Socorro, the thermometer

stood at 20°. The waters of this river are very dangerous, generally causing fever to those who bathe in them. A sudden indisposition with which I was attacked, in the midst of these unwholesome regions, from inhaling the air loaded with putrid effluvia and myriads of insects, convinced me that the report of my boatmen was but too well founded. I therefore hastened to quit them, and in proportion as I ascended into a purer atmosphere the inconvenience I felt gradually diminished, till upon my arriving at San-Bendito (14° R.), I found myself quite well. This village is entirely built with the fossils of ammonites of which the neighbouring mountains are full. A lead mine has been discovered in an adjoining village, called Guadera.

Upon leaving this village, I continued traversing more elevated places, filled likewise with fossils; but as these mountains are all composed of schistus, the road, in consequence of the rains, had become almost impassable. This bank of fossils which commences between Guadalupe and San-Bendito extends as far as Moniquira; some scattered layers are found in the province of Tunja. They follow the curve described by the chain of Opon, from the 74th to the 75th degree of west longitude. We slept at Puente Real, a village now in ruins. Stuffs were formerly manufactured there, which were as much esteemed for the brilliancy of their colours as those of Cucuy; but all the workmen have disappeared, and the manufactures

with them. Puente Real sends some of its produce up the Magdalena, by the route of Velez, the first town founded by the Spaniards in New Grenada. Formerly the communication with the river was by the road of Curare, where a very rich gold mine called Corcobada, has been discovered; this route has now been abandoned on account of the diseases which proved fatal to the majority of travellers.

Puente Real is the limit of the political frontier of Socorro, in fixing which the government has judiciously followed the suggestions of nature. In fact, that opening of the Cordillera, which forms the province of Socorro, the declivity of which is directed from Moniquira to San Gil, here becomes narrower, and the traveller finds himself among the mountains which till then extended like immense walls upon his right and left; those of the eastern side, being known by the name of Serinsa, those on the western by that of Opon. The influence of the rainy north-east winds begins to diminish at Puente Real, and a little higher, they become the bearers of fine weather.

The valley of Socorro must be rich in metals, excepting gold, which is not supposed to be very abundant. Its numerous strata of schistus contain iron and copper in large quantities.

Quitting the road from Puente Real to Bogot-

ta for that of Moniquira, which is in a south south-east direction, I began to traverse the vallies which intersect the higher parts of the Cordilleras; the roads were dreadful; for, the declivity of the mountains which I was ascending, being precisely the point most exposed to the clouds of the north-west, and one upon which they burst with the greatest violence, the whole of the surrounding country is an immense marsh, into which one sinks at every step. The soil is however the more fertile, and the natives assiduously cultivate it; but of what avail is so much abundance? surrounded on all sides by fields covered with luxurious vegetation, the wretched huts of these people, present the extremity of misery. This sight is the more striking, on arriving from Socorro, whose inhabitants are much more wealthy and happier. Great numbers of Indians are seen here, as if these people had reserved to themselves the places where the severity of the climate placed a barrier between them and their masters.

Moniquira is perceived afar off; a solitary palm-tree raises its head in the middle of the town; a signal by which it is recognised at a great distance. I entered just at the same time with a man who was conducting two children with their hands tied behind their backs. Upon seeing me, they threw themselves at my feet; I gave them some money, which they

received with much surprise, for as they took me for an officer of the republic, they did not expect to have been even noticed. Notwithstanding their wan and yellow complexions, which indicated long fast and excessive fatigue, they gave the money to their mother, who followed weeping most bitterly.

The physiognomy of their conductor was harsh in the extreme, and could only be exceeded in brutality by his language. On hearing him, I involuntarily recollected the slave merchants whom I had seen on the African coast, driving their victims before them in flocks. This recruiting officer was asked in my presence, why he had brought such tender soldiers? "It is not my fault," replied he, "*nothing* else was to be found at Santa-Anna; every one fled on my arrival."

This was not the only afflicting sight I witnessed at Moniquira. The dungeons were filled with conscripts torn in a similar manner from their families. Crowds of women, the mothers, wives or sisters of these unfortunates, besieged the gates of the prison, anxious to get conveyed to them all they could procure from the pity of the inhabitants of Moniquira.

Quitting this unfortunate village the next morning, I directed my steps towards the copper mine, at the risk of disappearing amid the deep marshes, which obstruct all the roads. As we approached the mine, we remarked that

the greater part of the quartz rocks, with which the country is filled, were covered with oxoid of copper. We at length reached the mine; all was dry here, the rain had entirely ceased; we were in a different region. Domingo Corredor, the proprietor of the mine, had the politeness to conduct me thither, and we descended by means of pieces of wood fixed in a rope. This mine is situated on the banks of a river. There are but three miners employed; the produce of the mine is therefore only estimated at two hundred arrobas of copper in eighteen months.\*

This mine was purchased for four thousand piastres, and, if worked in a more scientific manner, would probably produce immense profits. But in its present state, it only produces sufficient for the consumption of the surrounding province.

On quitting this mine, the traveller crosses the Moniquira, where great numbers of otters are caught; he then traverses *Ecce Homo*, a village quite deserted, and arrives at *Suta*, very rich in nitrous earth. The valley of *Suta* is very agreeable, its verdure flourishing, and its temperature milder than the rest of the province of *Tunja*: it is bounded on the south by a very high mountain, on which are a number of small

\* The capital sunk in this mine does not produce more than three per cent.

crosses : this is the road traversed by pilgrims on their way to Chiquinquirá ; we met several of them ; their noisy mirth, their songs, and bursts of laughter, were sufficient proofs that no ideas of austerity were associated with this pilgrimage, but that, on the contrary, it is a species of amusement.

It was not till the 12th that I could enter the Notre Dame de Lorette of Colombia. The church of Chiquinquirá is built upon a regular plan ; its interior is very simple. I had expected to have seen it filled with all the riches of the country, but I only found a few silver plates covering the altar ; this last was decked with flowers, and numerous censers exhaled perfumes which scented the whole edifice. The image of the Virgin is placed behind two gold embroidered curtains.

One of the sacristans drew them with trembling hand, and I contemplated the sacred image at my leisure : it is a wretched painting on canvass, representing a woman in a standing attitude, having on each side of her St. Anthony and St. Andrew. The image now shewn is new ; and by a miracle truly divine, was found in the place of the old painting, which had begun to fall into rags.

From November to April, the box of the Dominicans who have the care of the precious deposit, is filled with alms, offerings, and gifts.

The numerous ex-votos do not, as in European catholic churches, hang suspended from the roofs ; the sanctuary is not encumbered with rich stuffs, as at Mecca ; the offerings are here all collected in chests, which cannot take long filling, since no mass is said under six piastres, and as the rich inhabitants who repair thither from Popayan and Giron to thank the Virgin for the recovery of a child, &c. sometimes give more than a hundred.

The priests belonging to this temple lead a very delightful life in the convent which they have built near the church ; they are twelve or fourteen in number, and are replaced by others every six months. They are not, however, idle amid so much wealth : the administration of the property, which piety pours into their hands, requires much care ; it is very discreetly employed ; a great portion of it is appropriated to enlarging the convent, ornamenting the church, and especially to increasing the revenues, already considerable, of three farms which belong to the Virgin of Chiquinquira.

The attachment manifested by the Dominicans for this precious relic, is therefore very natural ; nor can they be blamed for having refused the offers made them by the secular clergy of Bogota, of farming it for forty thousand piastres.

Cervièrè, a French officer in the Colombian service, imagined, that if he could get possession



of this sacred image, the people would come and adore it at any place to which he might remove it, and that thus he, as the new pontiff, would reap the offerings of the pious. He was, however, deceived; the profanation excited the utmost horror, not a devotee made his appearance. Cervière was routed at a short distance from Bogota, to which place he had retired; and being more anxious to effect his own escape than to save this new labarum, he abandoned it at Cakesa; the afflicted Dominicans repaired thither, and brought it back in great pomp to Chiquinquirá; the pilgrimages immediately recommenced.

Upon quitting Chiquinquirá, I passed through several fine farms. Suta was the next village: it is situated in the midst of a plain terminating at the paramo of Noa, which is only separated from Chiquinquirá by a hill of small elevation. I afterwards arrived at Funeque: in the north-west there is also a lake of this name. A little beyond this hamlet is Ubate, a village of peculiar cleanliness for these regions; the schoolmaster has adopted for his sign the letters of the alphabet. The usual resting-place for the night is Suta Pelado (peeled): it is thus distinguished from the other Suta, on account of the scorching wind which burns up all the harvests, and ruins the farmers; this generally happens at the period when the easterly winds blow, these

coming from the snowy summits of Cucuy, pass over the province of Tunja, which is much lower than Suta Pelado. When viewed from this village, it appears an immense plain, the eastern paramos of which terminate the horizon; it is nevertheless very mountainous.

Beyond Suta Pelado is the Venta del Alto de la Cruz; the traveller then passes the Boqueron de Tauza, an opening made by the hand of nature in the midst of the mountains of Tauza: a salt mine is being worked in the neighbourhood. We suffered much from the cold as we traversed the paramo of Tauza; but I soon forgot all my privations and labours, in once more seeing the beautiful plain of Bogota extend itself before me as far as my eye could reach. I hastened my descent, and was soon at Zipaquira: it was market-day, a numerous and busy population imparted peculiar animation to the roads and streets. On every side, small tables, on which were placed a cloth and a loaf, served by way of sign to the different inns, and invited the traveller to enter: from the general bustle, one might have imagined one's-self in the capital of a vast empire; it was, however, only a village, richer in the possession of its salt mine, than Choco in the midst of the treasures with which it is filled.

I remained only one night at Zipaquira; the next day I traversed Gaëtan, and afterwards

found myself among the forests of apple-trees in which the Indians of Chia have constructed their huts. From thence, I proceeded to the banks of the Commun, which I crossed on a balsa, or raft; and then arrived at the Pantanal, which, in the rainy season, is a deep marsh. It was not without difficulty that we made our way along the road which leads to Bogota, and it was night when I re-entered that city after a month's absence.

The month which I again passed there was employed in collecting all that appeared to me proper to give an idea of the capital of the republic of Bogota: this will form the subject of the succeeding chapter.