

CHAPTER XV.

Departure from Popayan—Mine of Allegrias—Quitichao—The Cauca—Samondi—Cali—Departure from Cali—Las Juntas.

EVERY thing indicated that the winter season was on the eve of setting in : I was very apprehensive that it might overtake me in the inundated plains of the Cauca, and resolving not to prolong my stay at Popayan, hired a guide to conduct me to Cali. I should have preferred going to Quito, which is peculiarly interesting to a Frenchman, because it reminds him of the measurement of the first three degrees of the meridian, made by several of his learned countrymen.* But I was obliged to renounce this pleasure, as the revolt of Pasto and of Patia rendered it impossible to take that road, without running the risk of falling into the hands of the insurgents, the merciless enemies of all those who do not embrace their cause.

I therefore took the road to Cali : as in the valley of the Magdalena, I saw to the right and left, while I traversed that of the Cauca, the Cordilleras rising majestically, as if to cool and defend the country watered by that river.

* See note XI.

The valley of the Cauca is composed of two plateaus, very distinct by their elevation and their temperature: it is much richer than that of the Magdalena. The soil is deep, the pasturages rich and fertile, as is proved by the large size of the cattle, which, on the contrary, are very lean in the valley of the Magdalena, excepting at the foot of the Quindiu. The forests too are greener and less scorched by the heat of the sun, which dries up every thing during the summer in the valley of the Magdalena, while along the banks of this river, nothing is seen but wretched huts, and men covered with rags, and half savage; the banks of the Cauca, afford every where indications of opulence. The farm houses are spacious and well built, and nearly resemble the wealthy habitations of our colonies. The negroes, who cultivate the land, are all well clothed and appear to have a sufficiency of wholesome food. If we still see some huts covered with thatch, and some women in tattered garments, we every where find utensils of silver, and those very women who are so ill clothed are, on holidays, adorned with gold necklaces. A general decorum of manners prevails; even the muleteers, proud of being whites, are ashamed to go on foot, so that it is difficult to distinguish the poor from the rich.

This prosperity and opulence are to be ascribed to a fertile soil, better cultivated in

many places than on the Magdalena, and to abundant gold mines, though they are unskilfully worked. The earth tinged with red and yellow every where indicates the presence of gold: you constantly tread it under foot, and as a Spanish engineer said, the kennels of the streets, in the towns, bring it down after a storm.

We passed the night at los Corrales. The proprietors of this cottage, are very hospitable and very religious. At night on going to rest, and before they rise in the morning, every body repeats the rosario, a very long prayer, which, in many places, is recited with great fervor.

Accordingly we were awakened before day-break, by the singing of the pious men, as had occurred to me amongst the Mahometans in Africa. Continuing our progress to the north, we crossed the Quebrada de Tuina. An Indian village of that name, is situated in the neighbouring mountains. We afterwards passed the Pescador, and the Oveja, two pretty deep rivers, over which there are bridges; we then passed the mountain of Madomon, behind which, to the west, is a gold mine very famous in the country.

When I reached the mine of Alegrias, I had reason for astonishment, on hearing my guide enumerate all those towards which he pointed in different directions of the compass: to the east, Kina, Maion, Domingullo, Campo, San-Vicente; to the west, Cerro Gordo, Santa-Maria, San-

Miguel, Portugaleto, Honduras, and an infinite number of others, the names of which, I have forgotten. The mine of Allegrias gave me an exact idea of the others, and of the works of the miners. Some huts inhabited by negroes are scattered in the midst of groves of bananiers, which is their favorite tree. The ground is on all sides open and dug up to a small depth, it is intersected by small canals, so that the water flows on all sides, not as in the delicious valley of Neyva, to fertilize the fields but to carry away the earth which is afterwards washed in wooden bowls, as is practised in Africa. Nothing can be more arid than the soil near these mines, the red colour of the earth, which indicates its mineral wealth, is no sign of fertility. The water being ill conducted in the canals, spreads on all sides without improving the soil.

The view enjoyed from the summit of these auriferous hills of the plain of the Cauca, is admirable; a palm tree grows at this point, and seems to be the limit of the burning soil of the Cauca; though it is not so curious as the palm tree of Purace, it is perhaps more striking, for one would say, that it was placed by nature as a landmark, to indicate the change of the temperature of Europe to that of Africa.

At the foot of the plateau of Popayan, is the village of Quilichao, in a very advantageous position, being at the limits of the hot, temperate

and cold districts, which renders it the entrepot for the productions of all climates : it likewise possesses many gold mines, and is a very flourishing place. I went to pass the night farther on, at a *venta* where there were many traders on their way to Popayan with mules laden with sugar.

The following day, we entered the marshy plains which are periodically inundated by the waters of the Cauca and other rivers overgrown with rushes and reeds. Leaving Caloto, famous for its gold mines to the right, we soon after passed before the road to Cartago ; then crossing a considerable extent of land belonging to the inhabitants of Popayan, I found the operations of agriculture every where left to the slaves. The pride inspired by colour is no less great in the valley of Cauca, than in the colonies of the Antilles ; it is such that poor people do not cultivate any lands but in the mountains, where it is too cold to have negroes. At some distance, on the right of the road, flows the Rio Palo, celebrated in the country for the battle fought there by Samanon, which he lost ; his army chiefly consisting of Peruvians, was totally routed by that of the independents.

In the direction of Caloto, my guide pointed out to me the road to Pitañon, a hamlet justly celebrated for the Peruvian bark gathered in the neighbourhood, which is said to be of a much

superior quality to the bark of Loxa. It is sold at two piastres per arroba. Pitaïon is two days journey from the Balsa ; this habitation furnishes much less sugar than formerly, because most of the beasts of burden which it employed were destroyed in the late wars. It now produces only 8 or 9,000 pounds of sugar annually. The vessels made use of, are of copper.

At noon we crossed the river Taula, which frequently overflows its banks to a considerable distance, where, having passed through a forest full of climbing plants or bamboos, we found ourselves again on the banks of the Cauca. This river flows in a smooth current, and is not very wide at this place ; we passed it in a canoe, and proceeded on the road to Cali. At three o'clock, we were at Jamondi situated in the middle of a wood of goyava trees ; we afterwards crossed the Jamondi, and it was already night when we reached Cali. The town was illuminated and resounded with musical instruments, on account of the installation of the college, the foundation of which had been ordered by the government. I had much difficulty in obtaining a lodging ; the alcaid presided at the fête, and it was not till very late, that he could procure me a shop, where I passed a very indifferent night.

The following day we had a great deal of rain, but this did not hinder me from visiting the town. Its situation on the declivity of the west-

ern Cordilleras, seemed to me very agreeable. It is reported that, in former times, these mountains were sometimes covered with snow ; but at present none is to be seen. Cali is not only well situated, both for the enjoyment of life and for the climate, which is not excessively hot, but also for trade, it being the medium of communication between Popayan and the Ocean. This intercourse is pretty frequent and important at present, on account of the tobacco of Llano-Grande, a village between Caloto and Buga which is sent to Peru and Panama where it is highly esteemed.* The streets of Cali are straight, and the houses built of brick or of earth white-washed, a style of building, which gives an appearance of cleanliness not common in the eastern Cordilleras.

They have begun to build two churches, the architecture of which is remarkable for good proportions, and an improved taste ; it really excites surprise to meet with temples built with so much care, amidst the solitudes of New Grenada. There are several convents, now deserted ; all have been suppressed except that of the Franciscans, which contains sixteen monks.

Though the heat is rather intense at Cali, and the cocoa trees which grow there in

* On the spot it costs two piastres per arroba, at Panama, it is sold at six reals per pound.

abundance indicate a tropical temperature, the climate is healthy, and we see none of the deformities which afflict the valley of the Magdalena. I met with only one person that had a goitre, this was a Frenchwoman from Bayonne, who had been settled for many years at Cali, and had entirely forgotten the customs and the language of her native country. Yet the Spanish people are so little used to see strangers, that she is known in the town by the name of *La Franceza* ; she is the widow of an officer in the Spanish civil service.

The number of people of colour is considerable at Cali ; they are peaceable, because they hold a rank almost equal to those who call themselves whites ; they are not allowed however to go armed. The inhabitants of Cali are rich. The situation of the town doubtless constitutes to the prosperity they enjoy, yet they envy that of Carthago, which affords more real advantages. In fact, the latter placed almost at the extremity of the plains of the Cauca, at the point where the two Cordilleras approach, and leave only a narrow passage for the waters of the river, is the entrepot for the goods for Santa-Fè, which arrive by the Quindiu, and those for the Antilles or the Ocean which come by way of Novita, situated near the Rio San Juan. But the situation of Carthago is far from offering the en-

chanting prospect of Cali. Can we find there, waters so pure, so beautiful a river, more noble trees, more verdant fields, and a more striking prospect than that which the plains of Cauca afford at Cali?

The necessary arrangements for engaging a new guide, and hiring fresh mules, had detained me six days at Cali. This delay was caused by the slowness of the inhabitants of the country; every thing is done by negroes and mulattoes who are naturally indolent in business. I left Cali with great joy, though I anticipated the hardships and fatigues that awaited me in passing the Cordilleras; I was impatient to reach the port where I was to embark.

Our first day's journey was short. The roads were so narrow and so slippery, that it was difficult to proceed; night approached as we descended into the valley, where a pretty habitation has been built; it is called la Portera; the source of the Dagua is at a small distance from it.

The next day I proceeded towards the west north-west; I travelled in company with some negroes who had been taken prisoners in the Patia; they had been concerned in an insurrection which had menaced Popayan with a dreadful convulsion, and were being conducted to San-Buena-ventura.

They were bound in a singular manner, their

hands were fastened on the stomach, with cords which passed through a hollow piece of wood placed below the chin; these same cords were then strongly fastened round the neck, so that, by the slightest attempt to escape, the man strangled himself. This kind of manacles is said to have been taken from the Indians. Notwithstanding the terrible constraint which these negroes must have felt in walking, they kept pace with us who were on horseback.

We halted together at a place called Papaia-guero; leaving this hamlet, we continued to traverse the narrow valley watered by the Dagua, which we had to cross seven times before we reached a farm which bears the same name.

So far we had met with few hills that were difficult to pass; the ground was rather uneven than mountainous, and notwithstanding the small number of inhabitants that we met with, the road had appeared to me less fatiguing than any of those I had before traversed in other mountains. Quitting the farm of Dagua the ascent was very laborious till we reached some houses called las Ojas; this was nothing, after having given our mules some rest, we penetrated into very thick woods, and continued climbing the Cordilleras till two o'clock in the afternoon, when we arrived at las Juntas.

The road of las Juntas, is one of the most abo-

minable in the republic of Colombia, the ground sinking in under the feet of the mules, (for the communications are frequent between the great Ocean and the valley of the Cauca) has left on the right and left considerable elevations so well shaded by the foliage of the trees, that they cannot be discerned, it is like penetrating into a cavern ; there is only room enough for one mule, and this is so narrow, that I was obliged every moment to cross my legs in my saddle for fear of breaking them against the stones. Before we descended into these defiles, my guide cried out in a loud voice several times, and when he was quite certain that nobody was coming from the opposite side, we entered the pass, it was then our fatigues and our dangers commenced; for the whole place was full of water, and there were, on all sides, what the Spaniards call *cajones*, holes in which our mules sunk upto the breast. As they had not room for more than half their body, they were often obliged to stride over these cavities filled with mud and branches of trees, which they did with much agility; thus we arrived without accident at las Juntas.

This village is situated on an isthmus, watered on one side by the Dagua, and on the other by the Pepita, which unite at this place. Las Juntas is inhabited by merchants of Cali; the activity of these men in the western Cordillera, may

be compared to that of the inhabitants of Socorro in the eastern. The inhabitants of las Juntas are much distressed by want of provisions; they are of course not numerous; the pecuniary temptations held out by the salt and gold trade induce them to remain in this dreadful place, which they cannot quit without entering pathless forests.