

CHAPTER IV.

Route from Honda to Bogota—Rio Seco—Venta Grande—Mountain of Surjento—Valley of Guaduas—Billeta—Facatavia—Description of the plain of Bogota—Fall of Tequendama—Natural Bridge of Pandi.

At an early hour on the 15th of February I took leave of my obliging host. After traversing a very thick wood, we kept continually on the ascent till we arrived at a spot from which a prospect truly magnificent burst upon our view; the whole province of Maraquita lay before us, its mountains appearing from the place where we stood, but as insignificant hillocks: we could however distinguish the white houses of Maraquita.* Much nearer to us lay the town of Honda, the walls of which are washed by the Magdalena, whose verdant banks impart peculiar beauty to the surrounding landscape. One would have supposed it to have been the Seine meandering through the rich meadows of Normandy. This beautiful sight however soon vanished as I again struck into the wood, through the breaks of which the Magdalena appeared only a narrow

* Almost all the inhabitants of this town are afflicted with goitres.

stream of water, which, in a short time, was seen no more. We once more recommenced our ascent, and although I could not view without shuddering the terrific steepness of the Cordilleras, which I was traversing for the first time in my life, my fears were considerably diminished when I remarked the intelligence of the mule which bore me. It was truly astonishing to observe the sagacity with which the animal chose the rocks that afforded the surest footing. The muleteers have an excellent method of treating these animals: in these dangerous passes, they strike them but very seldom, encourage them by their voice, and support them behind when, climbing from rock to rock, they appear as if they would be precipitated every moment into the depths below. We crossed the Rio Seco, stopped a few moments at a venta, and continued crossing numerous streams which intersect the road in every direction; at length, we arrived at the Venta Grande. The inns of the Cordilleras exactly resemble those of Morales; if nothing is to be had, you have but little to pay.

The next day, we had to scale the Sarjento, nor have I yet forgotten the labour and fatigue it cost me. Suddenly enveloped in a cold damp fog, so thick as to prevent my distinguishing the men who were before me, we were, for a time, in complete darkness, and I was seized with that extreme lassitude and uneasiness, the

usual concomitants of this phenomenon so frequent in the Cordilleras. Towards noon the fog cleared off, and a few moments afterwards, we met with a stone on which was inscribed, the elevation of the ground above the level of the sea. We were at a height of 870 toises, and had still eighteen leagues to perform before we arrived at Santa-Fè. The roads now improved, and we soon reached the summit of a mountain, whence we perceived the beautiful valley of Guaduas.

I was extremely gratified upon descending to find myself in the midst of verdant meadows, every where intersected by streams, over which were thrown narrow but safe bridges. On my right and left were houses, surrounded by cultivation and shaded by willows, while numerous flocks of well fed cattle were peaceably grazing the rich pasture; the heat was moderate, being about the temperature of that of the Island of Madeira. We were now at an elevation in which man can enjoy his existence, so that by a descent of not more than 223 toises, nature assumed an aspect entirely different to that which we had observed on the heights we traversed in the morning.

The road being level, and in good order, I soon arrived at Guaduas. This town appeared to me very clean, some of its streets are paved and furnished with *trottoirs*, the square in which the church and other edifices stand, is ornamented

with a fountain, and the outsides of the houses being whitewashed, the appearance of the town is very cheerful. It is difficult for the traveller who has just toiled over the immense mountains of granite, which separate Guaduas from Magdalena, not to feel a degree of ecstasy upon suddenly finding himself in a valley, whose temperature is so mild, which is watered by limpid streams, and enriched with all the gifts of nature ; gifts which man, however, neglects to improve or even to avail himself of.

To the European who has recently left the shores of the Magdalena, the fair complexions of the inhabitants of this delightful spot, are particularly pleasing. He cannot but admire the native grace of the female villagers and the artful simplicity of their rustic dresses in which, perhaps, there is somewhat too much of affectation. It cannot be denied, however, that the American paysannes every where excel ours in the facility with which they acquire agreeable and fascinating manners ; their delicate and beautifully turned limbs are never enlarged, nor deformed by labour. Happy in living under so beautiful a climate, the inhabitants of Guaduas treat strangers with great kindness, of which I had a sufficient proof on my arrival, for they appeared delighted at having an opportunity of exercising their hospitality.

Guaduas forms a canton composed of seven villages, the population of which may amount

to about fourteen thousand souls. The greater part of the lands belong to Señor Acosta, the civil judge of the canton, whose hospitality and benevolent disposition are universal themes of panegyric. The produce of this country consists of rice, bananas, coffee, oranges, and sugar, of the latter article, the yearly crop is said to amount to 40,000 arrobas. At the distance of three days' journey from Guaduas is Palma, a village containing gold, iron, and emerald mines, which it is intended to work.

The next day, we discovered Billetta, at an immense distance; the view of it is very pleasing. This town suffers much from heat, its elevation above the sea not being more than 583 toises. At night, we perceived a cross, the sign of a venta, situated 908 toises above the level of the Ocean.

Notwithstanding our anxiety to arrive at Bogota the next day, we only got as far as Facatativa, by noon; but we had now reached the famous plateau of Bogota. Another spectacle totally different to any I had before seen now presented itself to me. I again found myself in Europe. Upon quitting Facatativa, I suffered considerably from the dust which the wind raises in clouds, and which begrimes the complexion of the inhabitants. I however got free from it before night, and could indulge at my ease the pleasure mingled with astonishment which

I felt at seeing the husbandmen occupied in tracing deep furrows, with ploughs drawn by oxen, and shepherds driving before them flocks of sheep covered like those in our country with thick fleeces. While contemplating a scene, which so forcibly recalled Europe to my recollection, my attention was called off by long files of mules and oxen laden with grain, coals, and sacks of apples, and others coming from Guaduas, carrying oranges, and tropical fruits. The drivers had a wild and savage appearance, a little opposed to the European character of the surrounding landscape; I could even have imagined myself suddenly removed to the plateaus of Tartary upon seeing these Indians, whose bodies almost naked, offered many points of resemblance with the inhabitants of Eastern Asia.

Above ten French leagues separate Facativa from Bogota. I was compelled to travel all night. The cold was very severe, and I suffered considerably from it. I did not arrive at Bogota till four o'clock in the morning, on the 20th February.

The plain of Bogota, situated in latitude $4^{\circ} 30'$ north, at an elevation of 1370 toises above the level of the sea, extends sixteen leagues from north to south, and eight from east to west. This plateau, surrounded by lofty mountains, presents a surface almost uniformly level.

The plain of Bogota underwent many dreadful revolutions, before its inhabitants, the Moscas, subjected to one master, had formed a nation united by the same worship. The old men, upon being questioned by the Spaniards, who had conquered their country, informed them, that, at a very remote period, the river Funza (Bogota) had overflowed all the plain; and that, seized with affright, the inhabitants fled to the mountains, where they found a secure asylum; that, in the midst of this frightful disorder, a holy man appeared, whose name was Zhue, or Bochica; that, with his wand, he struck the hardest of the mountains, which immediately opened, and the waters rushing through the miraculous issue, formed the celebrated fall of Tequendama. This popular tradition refers to a period when the waters entirely covered the whole plain of Bogota. Nothing is now seen in this place but numerous streams, some ponds, and two rivers, the Commun, and the Bogota or Funza.

It is indeed, in the plain of Bogota, that the traveller finds that new Europe announced to him at Honda when overcome with fatigue; he has no longer cause to fear either the wild beasts or the insects which desolate the countries watered by the Magdalena: upon these heights the cold is fatal to them. But if man does not run the same dangers here as in the

lower region, he sometimes suffers much by being suddenly transported into a climate, the temperature of which rarely exceeds 12° R. ; for the plain of Bogota is rather sobered by a perpetual autumn, than enlivened by the aspect of spring.

Apple-trees and willows are the only ones which grow in this plain ; but if the larger vegetables droop at this altitude, those of Ceres are in uncommon abundance, all the lands are covered with barley, corn, oats, and excellent pastures. It is a sight truly wonderful, to find a country as rich and fertile as that of Beauce, at an elevation which, in Europe, is covered with perpetual snows, and where man finds it difficult to exist.

I did not experience the same admiration as other strangers at the sight of kitchen and flower gardens in some spots of the plains of Bogota ; for, in fact, if it should create astonishment to find near the equator the vegetables and fruits of Europe, the colour and the flavour of these productions prove that the heat of these cantons is insufficient to bring them to maturity. The roses and pinks lose likewise all their charm, when it is known that their perfume cannot be inhaled for a moment without the organ of scent suffering violent agony from the stings of myriads of imperceptible insects lodged in their petals.

Notwithstanding these inconveniences, which may in time be obviated by more experienced

cultivators, it must be confessed, that the plain of Bogota, from its elevation, extent, and prodigious fecundity, surpasses what the most vivid imagination can conceive of the beautiful.

At the end of a few days I fell ill, the general fate of strangers on their arrival at Bogota. My greatest inconvenience was, not being able to leave the house; but my health gradually re-established itself. The first essay made of my strength, by training myself for future journeys, was to visit the fall of Tequendama, which is but four leagues from Bogota, and which, on account of the wonders related of it, is visited by all strangers. I, in consequence, set forward in the month of April, accompanied by two inhabitants of Bogota. We directed our course towards the south-west. The road was tolerably pleasant as far as Soacha, a village at which travellers generally pass the night, and in the neighbourhood of which are found the fossil remains of elephants. The inn resembles our country public-houses, which is wonderful in this country.

The next day, after having coasted the peaceful Bogota, we crossed it upon a bridge made of rushes, on the other side of which we found the farm of Canoa; we then commenced an ascent by a road so slippery, that our horses could no longer keep their footing.

Ull then, we had travelled in a plain partly

inundated, bounded on all sides by arid mountains, and having barren hills scattered upon it like islands in the midst of a lake. We were now traversing a country entirely new, covered with lofty trees, the sight of which was very gratifying to us. We were no longer annoyed by the gloomy prospect of the black rocks surrounding the plain of Bogota; on the contrary, on every side were seen vallies, fertile mountains, and little houses embedded in the midst of plantations of bananas, whose verdure, softer to the eye, relieved in the most agreeable manner the deeper green of the forests.

In the midst of the pleasure afforded us by this view, we saw with anxiety the summits of the mountains hid in the clouds, which were rapidly descending towards the places where they are converted into storm and rain. We therefore urged on our horses.

In striking into the marshy woods, which over-shadow the famous fall of Tequendama, our horses became useless to us, and were fastened to trees. With the assistance of sticks, we descended the muddy paths by which the wood-cutters make their oxen drag up the wood which they sell in the town. The noise of the fall was heard, but nothing could be seen. After many windings and turnings, we at length found we had lost our way; not a soul was to be seen who could set us right. At length, one of us

fortunately perceived a path, the steep descent of which was rendered more practicable by steps made with branches. This rough piece of workmanship led him to hope that men were to be met with. He descended, but at first discovered nothing but a stream and a cavern. He was about to re-ascend, when, to his great surprise, he saw a man appear at the entrance of the cavern, who offered to serve as our guide, upon learning our embarrassment. The cavern was a mine dug under the rocks at a great expense, where a few pounds of pit-coal was daily obtained with vast labour. There was only a narrow passage excavated, and no attempt had been made to blast the rock.

We were farther from the fall than we had imagined, and, at the risk of sinking a hundred times in the mud, we arrived before Tequendama. Never did I experience such sensations as those caused me by the view of this cascade. I was at first so dazzled, that I could scarcely see the objects around me. I was wrapt in mute admiration at seeing the waters of the Bogota precipitate themselves in mass, over the rocks which they have crushed, like an avalanche detached from the top of Chimborazo. In order to observe the fall the more safely *, we laid our-

* Bolivar stood upright upon one of the rocks which bar the issues of the river.

selves down flat upon the rocky wall, forming the side of the precipice above which we were placed.

Our eyes penetrated into the abyss without perceiving aught but waves of foam continually swallowed up in an ocean of vapour. We were in astonishment, and yet only perceived one part of this imposing spectacle, on account of the profound obscurity in which the haze enveloped us. We anxiously wished for a clearer sky. The waters of the river falling from the frozen heights of the Cordilleras into the foaming gulfs, hollowed out at their base, formed a thick fog, which, raised up by the sun, whose face it obscured, inundated us on all sides.

We waited with impatience for the moment when we could admire this wonder of nature, which we had come so far to contemplate: it suddenly discovered itself, but only for a few instants. The clouds at length dissipating, we were enabled to take a rapid view of the phenomenon of the fall. Measuring first the heights above us*, we saw, amid the palm-trees which cover that region, a rivulet (the Bogota) meandering through a region glowing with verdure, inhabited doubtless by animals of the torrid zone. Above these blooming fields, a projecting rock, against which the Bogota dashed itself, threw up the river's foaming waves on high,

* Seventy-eight toises in height, according to Salazar.

like two crystal columns completely detached from the vapours, which they continually produce. The view in front of us was not less imposing : along the gigantic mountains forming the opposite shore, several streams fell in cascades, which, at the distance we were from them, appeared to us like plates of silver. Soon all was shrouded in darkness, the sun withdrew itself, and the rain fell in torrents. We were compelled, much against our inclination, to quit this magnificent spectacle, and to return to Bogota, lest night should surprise us amid these inundated forests.

My expedition to Tequendama had raised in me a wish to visit the other wonders of the country, so classically described by M. de Humboldt*. I was naturally desirous of seeing the bridge of Pandi ; for which purpose, providing myself with a guide, I again left Bogota towards the end of April, shaping my course towards the south-east.

I first traversed Fusagasuga, situated at an elevation of 940 toises, and consequently far lower than the plateau of Bogota, by which the village has the advantage of a milder temperature and a greater variety of harvests. I left upon the right Chocho, a village which takes its name from a tree very common in all these

* Vue des Cordillères.

parts. I climbed the Alto de Honda, and after much fatigue and difficulty, arrived at the end of two days at Mercadillo, after having traversed a country almost desert ; I every where found a heat of from 18° to 20°, R.

Mercadillo was founded a few years since, for the purpose of attracting there the Indians of Coundaïe, who live in the neighbourhood. These men, half savages, are too fond of their independence, and not sufficiently so of the whites to be induced to increase the population of Mercadillo. Quitting this hamlet, I found myself within the Indian territory of Coundaïe : the lands are all uncultivated ; it is with difficulty that bananas, sugar canes, and a few indigenous fruit trees are here and there to be seen. The goats and cows, which are met wandering about this wild country, belong to the inhabitants of Mercadillo ; who not less careless than the Coundaïen Indians, let their cattle devour and destroy the vanilla, which grows here in immense quantities.

One hour sufficed for us to arrive at the natural bridge of Pandi. It is formed of a stone not more than twenty feet wide ; placing myself upon it, I cast my eyes down into the opening which separates the two mountains, and which is in depth about 363 feet. I perceived a stream of water, which, at the elevation where I stood,

appeared to me a rivulet. The shortest distance however must be traversed in a piragua. Among the enormous stones which, in rolling from the summits of the mountains, have been stopped in the immense gap, that which formed the bridge, less attracted my admiration, than one of prodigious size which is beneath it, and which, like the key stone of an arch, is suspended in the air, and seems every moment threatening to fall with hideous ruin.

The inhabitants of the country believe these frightful gulphs to be the entrances to hell. And indeed the continual night which reigns there, the birds of darkness whose mournful cries re-echo in the caverns which serve as their retreat during the day, the murky waters which fill the depths of this precipice, the thick foliage of the trees which partly conceal this place of mystery, the noisy turbulence of the waters, the rocks, which, like the bridge of the Persian mythology, serve to cross them, and lastly the darkness which shrouds all these horrors, convey no feeble idea of the empire of death. The illusion is the stronger from the greater part of living creatures avoiding the savage spot; the habitations of man are far removed from it, and all animals seem to dread the fearful noises which are there heard. Thus the traveller experiences much satisfaction upon emerg-

ing from these antique forests, imbrued perhaps by the Indian priests with the blood of human victims, to find again the chearful light of day, and prospects less sad and gloomy.

I re-ascended toward Mercadillo, not less astonished than I had been at Tequendama, although the bridge of Pandi had appeared to me less striking than the fall. This work proves the mighty powers of nature ; to establish a bridge of communication, it sufficed for her to roll down a few rocks from the heights of the mountains.

Approaching the summits of the mountains which command Mercadillo, and whence may be perceived the Llanos* de Limone extending as far as the Magdalena, we soon traversed primitive forests peopled by the bear, the jaguar and the congouar, and by nightfall were in Fusagasuga. In proportion as we removed from the burning valley of Mercadillo, we found a race of men more handsome and vigorous.

On the morning of the next day, I returned to Bogota. Till six o'clock we had travelled in the midst of fields of mace, sugar canes, coffee and chirimoya (*Annona*) : at nine o'clock I found myself within the shade of the Kinas, and surrounded with fogs ; at eleven, in the barren furzes of the mountain summits, and almost

*The *Llanos* are plains, many of which form the tract of country called *Llanura*.—*Translator*.

drowned with incessant rains ; at three, I descended the declivities, amid fine countries covered with barley, and excellent pastures, and refreshed by a breeze which, towards evening, was cold. At length, after having passed from the fertile coasts, bordering the plateau on the south, into the regions sometimes inundated and sometimes parched, which adjoin the capital, and which are only to be traversed with the assistance of bridges of stones, we entered Bogota at midnight.