

CHAPTER III.

Branch of the Magdalena—The Miel—Rio Negro—Guarumo—The Promontory of Garderia—The Rocks of Perico—Honda—Description of the Magdalena.

ON our departure from Nare, we directed our course towards the right bank of the river; and hardly had we entered one of its branches, which is called the Tiger, than we lost no time in looking out for some place of shelter; for the sky was overcast with clouds, the sure presage of a storm, and we were anxious to arrive at some habitation before being overtaken by the night. Both banks of the river were thickly covered with trees, and we almost despaired of being able to discover any sandy bank upon which we might land, when we perceived a cabin upon the right in the midst of the bushes. Our piragua was quickly pushed towards this asylum, and displacing a canoe which was fastened to some reeds, my bogas substituted ours in its place. As soon as we were securely moored in this harbour, we all jumped on shore, armed completely as if going to take some fortified place by storm; and rapidly ascending the

steps, which were unequally cut out of the bank of the river, quickly reached the top.

Before us, in a court-yard surrounded with bananas, we perceived a sort of shed elevated upon stakes, on which we found a linen bed spread upon a bamboo frame; here and there were a few calabashes; in one corner were the remains of a fire, and some slices of meat were hung up to dry; the whole was in a state of such disorder, as plainly indicated the fright that our appearance had occasioned to the proprietor of this habitation;—every thing was open to our free inspection, for there were neither walls, nor even mats to form an inclosure to this miserable cabin.

Our visit had not taken place without exciting the plaintive howlings of some dogs that guarded the house, to which the master was some time before he paid any attention; at last he suddenly came forward from one of the thickest parts of the wood that surrounded and shaded his dwelling. He presented himself before us with an air of anxiety which did not escape the notice of the pilot of our party, who took advantage of it to demand some refreshment, which was quickly prepared for him. Not contented with this civility, he asked our host, in an arrogant manner, "Are you not a Spaniard?" which the other denied in so feeble a manner, as to increase the audacity of

the sailor, who thenceforth, in spite of all my intreaties, left him no peace from his importunities.

The storm forced us to sup all together under the roof of our entertainer, whose restless vigilance was not contented with obliging his family to pass the night in the woods, but also prevented him from taking the least repose. He remained outside the hut like a centinel to watch our motions, and to resist, as much as possible, the violence of my bogas. With how many cares did this intrusion of ours poison the hitherto peaceful life of this solitary man! How little could he have supposed, that in hiding himself upon one of the scattered arms of the Magdalena, his roof continually exposed to the winds and storms, would afford shelter to guests equally as dangerous!—Such an event would probably induce him to establish his retreat amidst the dens of the jaguars, whose repose he, in his turn, would thus destroy, to afford him some assurance of his own tranquillity.

Our fatigues commenced the next day, but we discovered nothing remarkable until five o'clock, when our attention was taken by a strong smell of musk. My bogas attributed it to the odour of a serpent, but none of us were tempted to examine whether the conjecture was true: if it could have been done without the dread of any dangerous encounter, we should

have been tempted to make some stay in this place: it was an isle where the soil, continually fertilized by the inundations of the river, seemed to be more fruitful than elsewhere. The ceibas were more elevated and more majestic, and in place of guarumos, occupied by myriads of flies, of which the trunks thus destroyed incumbered the navigation, one perceived bowers widely spread, which seemed to invite the traveller to repose himself from the heat of the sun. Here and there we observed with surprise several trees spread out exactly like a fan or an umbrella, similar to those which we meet with in ancient parks; and thus, the playful sport of nature seemed to be the work of man. It was not however in this charming place, perfumed with musk, that my bogas wished to stop, for they gave the preference to a bank of sand.

This day, the 1st of February, we left, on our right, the river Miel, whose very cold and clear water invited us to fill several jars with it for the remainder of the voyage. Its value seemed to be much more precious, after having had no other drink than the yellow and muddy waters of the Magdalena.—At night we entered Buenavista.

Early in the morning, we passed the mouth of the Rio Negro, which issues from the mountains of Zipaquira; we then perceived Guarumo;

on the right bank of the river, in the middle of a wood of cocoa-trees.

This hamlet seems destined to be much enlarged, if, as is proposed, the road of Bogota to the Magdalena should be conducted through it. Nature here becomes more barren, and the branches of the Cordilleras more contracted; the river also gets narrower, and is filled with stones that roll from the tops of the mountains. The currents are here so rapid, that their violence is stemmed with great difficulty. Choaked up between heights covered with rocks, the Magdalena impetuously pours forth its waters through the narrow mouths which it has opened for itself; and if nature did not break the violence of the shock, by the numerous angles which are presented by the projecting arms of the Cordilleras, it would be impossible to navigate the piraguas in the narrow valley through which the river runs, and which is but the declivity of the platform that stretches from Chaguanes to Nuestra Señora de la Purificacion.

The 13th afforded us but few observations; before night, however, I was struck with the singular aspect presented by the Cape of Garderia. Similar to all those on the banks of the Magdalena, it is as perpendicular as a wall, and is composed of three separate layers of clay, forming angles of lively and diversified colours. Enemies of trouble and noise, the caymans usually forsake

the upper parts of the river ; but we found several at the foot of Garderia, whose peaceful waters accorded better with their habits. Herons, egrets, and other birds, the prey of these amphibious animals, occupy the top of this diversified hill.

We soon lost view of the Cape of Garderia, and, from the darkness of the night, of the Cerania of Garapapi. Before noon, we reached Perico, formed of rocks, against which the water breaks with a roar, and returns back in waves of white foam, as on the borders of the sea. Not being able to use either the pole or the oar, a boga cast himself into the water, furnished with a rope, and, making the shore, fastened it to the trunk of a tree, that we might be enabled to tow the boat along. This manœuvre was badly executed, for the cord broke, and the piragua was dashed in the midst of the rocks. The bogas that were with me, seeing this accident, plunged into the water, and saved themselves by swimming ; and, upon arriving ashore, cried out to me that the canoe was lost, and must be abandoned. Being unable to swim, I was obliged to cling to the boat, though it had over-set, and at every jolt I expected it would have been broken to pieces ; this, however, was not the case, and I kept myself above water, which was happily rather shallow, for a little lower down I should certainly have been drowned.

All my hopes, the fruit of six months labor and patience, were in this boat, and I should have been ruined if the things it contained had been lost, for I had no one to whom I could have addressed myself for help in the situation in which I should have been placed.—Pity is insensible to shipwrecks in a river, and laughs at the recital of the dangers there run.

Deafened by the roaring of the waters and incensed by the cries of my fugitive boatmen, I leaped into the water which came up to my chin, and availing myself of an oar which I had seized at the moment of the accident, used it as a lever with which I lifted up the boat; when the negroes saw me thus employed, they were surprised at my success, and animated by this sentiment afforded me their help, and by our united efforts we got the piragua once more afloat. I then placed myself in it, and my sailors swam to the bank, guiding the boat with an oar, through the middle of the rocks.

As soon as we had arrived in safety ashore, we emptied the boat, and found she swam low in the water; many of my effects were lost, and most of the rest were spoilt, but I was too happy in having escaped the danger that had menaced me, to take much interest about this loss. I could not, however, forbear reproaching my negroes with their cowardly desertion of me: they were so much ashamed of it, that they could

not answer a word. The sun soon dried the boat and we all entered it. But before setting out I took every necessary precaution to prevent a recurrence of our misfortune. Since the accident of the morning I had obtained such an authority over my men, that I did as I thought proper with them. I arrived without any fresh disaster at Honda, two-and-twenty leagues from Bogota. This town is situated in a confined valley, surrounded on all sides by mountains; the heat is very suffocating. Two bridges must be crossed before entering it, the last one is thrown over the Guali, an impetuous torrent which falls into the Magdalena. These wooden bridges are boldly constructed upon broken pieces of rock that serve as piers, and which are thrown from the mountains by the force of earthquakes.

That which Honda experienced about fifteen years ago, has left many traces of its ravages. Several houses, and even one church are still in ruins, but there yet remain some regular edifices. The streets, which are paved, are formed in a straight line; and the place possesses some importance, because the boats which come from the maritime provinces stop here, and dispose of their cargoes that are hence forwarded into the interior of the country. A custom-house is established here.

I now crossed the other bank of the Magda-

lena to get to the road which leads to the capital and congratulated myself in being able, at last, to bid adieu to my boatmen whom I hastened to discharge.

I was hospitably entertained at the dwelling of a custom-house officer, by whose advice I made a bargain with some muleteers, who had the charge of a consignment of tobacco, on account of the government. Our arrangements were soon completed, and being able to depend upon having their mules, I proposed availing myself of the opportunity of pursuing my journey as early as the following day.

The Magdalena issues from the lake of Pappas, in latitude $1^{\circ} 5'$ north and longitude 14° west, and in almost all its course flows along the same meridian. The Cauca, whose sources are beyond those of the Magdalena, would offer the same advantages for navigation as this river, did not its bed gradually become narrower as it approaches the place of confluence with the Magdalena; a circumstance which renders the course of the Cauca in many parts dangerous and impracticable. The Magdalena, on the contrary, becomes wider as it recedes from its source.

Nature seems to have designedly dug the bed of the Magdalena in the midst of the Cordilleras of Columbia, to form a canal of communication between the mountains and the sea; yet, it would have made nothing but an unnavi-

gable torrent, had it not stopped its course in many parts, by masses of rock disposed in such a manner as to break its violence. Its waters thus arrested, flow gently into the plains of the provinces of Santa-Martha and Cartagena, which they fertilize and refresh by their evaporation. Three very distinct temperatures reign on the Magdalena: the sea breezes blow from its mouth as far as Monpox; from this town to Morales not a breath of air tempers the heat of the atmosphere, and a man would become a victim to its power, but for the abundant dews which fall during the night from Morales as far as the sources of the Magdalena; the south wind moderates the heat of the day and forms the third temperature. It is these land breezes which cause the navigation of the Magdalena to be rarely fatal to Europeans. But though man's existence is not here in immediate peril, he himself does not, on the other hand, enjoy a moment's repose; along the whole of this river a multitude of insects wage a distressing war against him. Mosquitoes near the sea, and up the coast a small species of fly, cover him with their venomous stings, and when he enters into a cooler region, enormous flies called *tabanos* glut themselves with his blood.

Should he wish to bathe, he fears being devoured by caymans, and if he venture on shore, he often has to dread the poison of serpents. Nothing

is therefore more alarming than a voyage on the Magdalena. Even the sight is rarely gratified, for the fertile banks of this river, which ought to be covered with cocoa trees, sugar canes, coffee, cotton, indigo and tobacco; those banks which should present the thirsty traveller with the delicious fruits of the tropics, and be adorned with thousands of beauteous flowers, are covered with thick bushes, bind-weed, and thorns in the midst of which shoot up the cocoa and palm trees.