

CHAPTER XVII.

Description of the town of Panama—The women of Colombia.

GUAYAQUIL is built of wood, Buenaventura of straw; Panama has retained something of both these kinds of architecture; at first sight, however, this town pleases the European; he sees houses of three stories, inhabited by several families; consequently, as in his own country, noise and bustle.

To these features of resemblance, which first strike him, must be added others that are less agreeable, especially excessive uncleanness, increased by that carelessness, which is natural in a warm country, and among a people of Spanish origin. At Carthagena there is not a single chair, here the houses are crowded with furniture; fowls and pigeons enter every where, while, in the court yard, the pigs live on all the filth which is thrown out of the windows; this being only means the inhabitants have yet found of getting rid of it.

The streets are narrow, and much darker than those of Carthagena, and even much dirtier; at night they are sufficiently lighted by

the shops, where the tradespeople endeavour to introduce a degree of order and neatness, which shews their frequent intercourse with the English. The magazines of provisions, in particular, are better arranged than those of the towns of the interior; they contain many articles of the United States, and a great quantity of wines and liquors of all kinds. There is a coffee house at Panama, where nothing but coffee is sold: it is much drunk in the towns of the great Ocean, and begins to supercede chocolate.

Panama is divided into the upper and lower town; this latter part is called *el Varal*, it is the most populous; nothing but men of colour are met with here, though they are admitted into society, and though all kind of respect is affected towards them, yet, at a ball which took place a little before my arrival, the whitest ladies refused to dance with the black officers of the garrison; it required all the authority of their husbands to oblige them.

Panama has, in fact, no port; we saw neither quay, bason, nor dock. Near the landing place, is a flight of steps leading to a dark passage where the market is kept. The roads are very bad on account of the north winds, which are sometimes very violent.

Panama is built on a peninsula, so that, being surrounded by water on almost every side, the air is unwholesome, and epidemic disorders

frequent: the heat is very severe, and the rains are of long continuance. The inhabitants of Panama have often had to repulse the attacks of the Indians; at present they enjoy profound peace. The Indians have retired into their mountains, situated at four days' journey from the capital, and never leave them except for the purposes of barter. They are believed to be cannibals, and for this reason, people are afraid to approach cape Garachine, whither they sometimes resort. On several occasions, however, government couriers have been sent by the way of Darien; though they have never been attacked, the roads are so bad, that it is thought better to follow the old way opened by the Spaniards, by the great Ocean, between Panama and the capital. But, instead of going to Cupica, they now go to San-Buena-ventura. This service is very indifferently performed.

The men and women dress in the English fashion. The latter go barcheaded, and let their hair fall in tresses on their shoulders. In general there is more elegance in the costume at Carthage, and more originality at Santa-Fè. The women of the lower classes have retained the fur-belows and the laces, which have long since disappeared among us. They often use their ruffles instead of pocket handkerchiefs, and have the strange custom of concealing their money and their segars in their hair.

I could not form an opinion of the women of Colombia, till I had visited the two regions of which the country is composed ; the Cordillera and the plains. I therefore determined not to say anything on this delicate subject till I arrived at Panama ; in which I was right, for this city has furnished me with a multitude of traits, which were wanting to complete the portrait I had sketched of the Colombian women. It has been continually reported that the Spaniards are extremely jealous of their wives ; they have been always represented with a dagger in their hands : this certainly is not the case in America. In the very different climates of the Andes and the Llanos, the women equally exercise an irresistible influence over their indolent and enervated husbands. Far from being confined within iron gratings, diversions, balls, visits, everything is permitted them, without their having to fear the controul of their husbands, who rarely accompany them. Slaves in the hot countries, and female servants in the cold countries, are alone admitted to the secret of their promenades, in which they attend them.

It is a pretty general opinion that, in proportion as the country is warmer, the hair of the women is blacker, and that in the cold countries it is generally fair. This observation, though correct in Europe, does not apply here ; it is quite the contrary. At Cartagena, we see many wo-

men with fair, and even red hair ; and at Santa-Fè, where the temperature is so cold, we find none but brown. It is with surprise that we see on the coast of Colombia, only 10 degrees from the line, women, whose thick hair is of a length that might be envied in Europe. Those who possess it are of course very careful to make it one of their finest ornaments. At Panama, they form it into two tresses, which hang down on their shoulders ; at Carthagena, they arrange it in thick tufts on the front of the head, where it is generally fastened by a tortoise shell comb, and flowers of different colours are artfully mixed with it. In some parts of the Cordillera, the ladies fasten in their hair shining insects called Cucuyos, the lustre of which is superior to that of the emerald.

In the women of warm climates, there is nothing more beautiful than the head ; the features have a delicacy, the eyes a lustre which is found only in Spanish women. They have also pretty hands ; their feet are extremely small, but this, perhaps, injures the equilibrium of the body, the continual see-saw of which is far from graceful. Nevertheless, the ladies of the *tierras calientes* have much more dignity in their carriage than those of the cold countries ; the former have the manners of ladies of quality ; the others have too often the awkward air of bourgeois.

If the hair of the latter is not so beautiful

as that of the women on the coast, if their eye is without expression, if their hands and feet are not so delicate as those of their rivals, they have, on the other hand, forms which retain their grace to an advanced period of life, and are free from that leanness, with which the others may be reproached; the women of the Andes would be even much more beautiful, if they had not in general bad teeth; the beauty of their complexion cannot fail to please a European in particular, though it is far from equaling that of the women of Europe. In general, the Flemings may give an idea of the children of the Spaniards in the Cordillera; the two races, derived from a common origin, but chilled by an equally cold climate, have a striking resemblance even in their accent: it is nearly the same. Like the Flemish women, those of the *tierras frias*, have rather too much *embonpoint*; they have neither the English melancholy nor the German languor; a pleasing smile, which is their true character, is always on their lips; their countenance is impressed with an air of kindness and mildness, which their humane and charitable character does not contradict. The Arab nasal pronunciation, which the women on the coast have, in a very great degree, often renders their language disagreeable; the women of the Cordillera, on the contrary, speak in a slow

and measured manner, like the creoles of our Antilles.

The costume of the women of the Cordillera is very original; when they go abroad, they wear a black silk petticoat, which is sufficiently close to shew the form; a piece of blue cloth thrown over the head, and falling in a triangular shape down to the waist, is contrived to hide the arms, which are always bare; no part of the face is to be seen except the nose and eyes. Above this mantilla, they put on a hat with a shallow crown, and broad brim. The women of the coast gradually renounce the elegant costume of the Andalusians, to adopt that of the English ladies.

The education of the women of Spanish America is much less advanced than that of the women of North America; a very few are able to sing or play on some instrument; yet they are naturally better musicians than the others; they are intelligent, quick of apprehension, and learn with facility; on the other hand, they are deficient in judgment and taste.

The Colombian women have no great love for each other; party spirit is not the only cause of this antipathy. Envy, the rivalry of rank, fortune, origin, cast, diffuse in society a spirit of hatred, which is not at first observed amidst the caresses which they lavish on each other, and

which shews the great art of the people of the hot countries in dissimulation. But when two female friends, if there be any such, open their hearts to each other, then their neighbours are sacrificed without mercy; they exhaust all the sarcasms of slander. This is a kind of conversation natural enough to women who seldom go out, and pass their days in turning over a book, which ennui makes them throw aside twenty times, or in braiding their hair, or in reclining on a bed and smoking a segar.

Slander is not the only aliment of the conversation of the Colombian ladies; love also has a great share in it: they speak of it with the freedom that men in France use in their conversations. They talk of the lover of la Seraphina, la Concepcion, la Incarnacion, with an openness which would make a well educated European lady blush. Confided from their tenderest infancy to the care of corrupt servants, many young ladies derive their first ideas from their conversation, and they are acquainted with the language of vice, while they are ignorant of that of virtue which is spoken to them at the age of twelve years, by a confessor, who is sometimes ignorant, and often dangerous. Leaving the convents, where they are taught nothing but reading and writing, they enter the world at the age of fifteen, without any means of resist-

ing the dangers to which they are exposed, but the first ideas of their childhood. Instead of turning their thoughts to useful employments, or agreeable arts, the only diversion they know is that of smoking.

Such they are, when their parents, weary of a long, and often useless superintendence, think of marrying them. Their choice is soon made, for they have only to attend to some pecuniary considerations. The marriage is concluded; ardent desires are soon satisfied, the man and wife soon perceive that they have never loved each other; and this observation is soon succeeded by hatred. In general the appearances of concord and friendship are preserved till the birth of the second child. They then come to an amicable rupture, and the husband separates from his wife. Such is the termination of marriages in the eastern Cordillera.

It is different on the coast and in the western Cordillera; the conduct of the women is more strict; wherever there are helots, the women are more reserved, because it is necessary for them to be on their guard before their slaves, in order to insure their respect and obedience. On the other hand, the morals of the men are perhaps less pure than elsewhere. It is affirmed that the women of the hot countries are much more interested than those of the cold ones:

shall we then suppose that, virtue as it is more or less austere, is but interest better or worse understood? All the women are very devout without being fanatical; they are fond of the ceremonies of religion because they are eager for something to occupy their attention.

The women of the Cordillera and the plain, therefore, have opposite kinds of beauty; however, no great difference is observable in their habits and character: the antipathy between them is excessive; those of the coast give to the women of the Andes the name of *lanútas*, or woolly, because they are dressed in cloth; the latter call the others by the epithet of *calentanas*, hot. National hatred has in general no other origin than the rivalry and the quarrels of the women; and here the nature of the country contributes to foment and to perpetuate them.

I am now on the point of quitting Colombia, after having travelled in it a whole year. I have been enabled, during this long stay, to collect a multiplicity of details, many of which were little known; I have introduced them in the preceding narrative, but I have not completed my task. I have spoken only in a cursory manner of the manufactures, the commerce, and the agriculture of the country; and I must not leave it without giving a more particular

account of these several branches of public prosperity. I intend to make a few observations on the physical appearance of Colombia, and the public spirit of the inhabitants. They will serve to explain a thousand particulars which seem to contradict the ideas generally entertained of the equinoctial countries of America and the people who inhabit them.