

the next morning I resumed my journey. Though early in the dry season, the ground was parched, and the streams were dried up. We carried a large calabash with water, and stopping under the shade of a tree, turned our mules out on the plain and breakfasted. I was riding in advance, with my poncha flying in the wind, when I saw a drove of cattle stop and look wildly at me, and then rush furiously toward me. I attempted to run, but, remembering the bull-fights at Guatemala, I tore off my poncha, and had just time to get behind a high rock as the whole herd darted by at their full speed. We continued our route, from time to time catching glimpses of the Pacific, till we reached a clear, open place, completely protected from the wind, and called the Boca of the Mountain of Nicaragua. A large caravan had already encamped, and among the muleteers Nicolas found acquaintances from San José. Their cargoes consisted of potatoes, sweet bread, and dolces for Nicaragua.

Towards evening we wound for a short distance among the hills that enclosed us, ascended a slight range, and came down directly upon the shore of the sea. I always had a high feeling when I touched the shore of the Pacific, and never more so than at this desolate place. The waves rolled grandly, and broke with a solemn roar. The mules were startled, and my macho shrunk from the heaving water. I spurred him into it, and at a moment when I was putting in my pocket some shells which Nicolas had picked up, he ran away. He had attempted it several times before in the woods; and now, having a fair chance, I gave him a full sweep of the coast. We continued nearly an hour on the shore, when we crossed a high, rough headland, and again came down upon the sea. Four times we mounted headlands, and again descended to the shore, and the heat became almost intolerable. The fifth ascent was steep, but we came upon a table covered with a thick forest, through which we proceeded until we came to a small clearing with two huts. We stopped at the first, which was occupied by a black man and his wife. He had plenty of corn; there was a fine pasture-ground near, so hemmed in by the woods that there was no danger of the mules escaping, and I hired the man and woman to sleep out of doors, and give me the hovel to myself.*

* At this place Mr. Stephens devoted a few days to examine the ground between the Pacific Ocean and the Lake of Nicaragua, through which the projected inter-oceanic canal is proposed to be made, and on the 1st of March resumed his journey towards Guatemala.—F. C.

CHAPTER XIX.

VISIT TO THE VOLCANO OF MASAYA—VILLAGE OF MASAYA—LAKE OF MASAYA—NINDIRI—ASCENT OF THE VOLCANO—ACCOUNT OF IT—THE CRATER—DESCENT INTO IT—VOLCANO OF NINDIRI—IGNORANCE OF THE PEOPLE CONCERNING OBJECTS OF INTEREST—RETURN TO MASAYA—ANOTHER COUNTRYMAN—MANAGUA—LAKE OF MANAGUA—FISHING—BEAUTIFUL SCENERY—MATEARES—QUESTA DEL RELOX—NAGAROTIS—CROSSES—A GAMEKEEPER—PUEBLO NUEVO.

MARCH 1.—Anxious as I was to hurry on, I resolved nevertheless to give one day to the Volcano of Masaya. For this purpose I sent a courier ahead to procure me a guide up the volcano, and did not get off till eleven o'clock. At a short distance from the city we met a little negro on horseback, dressed in the black suit that nature had made him, with two large plantain leaves sewed together for a hat, and plantain leaves for a saddle. At the distance of two leagues we came in sight of the volcano, and at four o'clock, after a hot ride, entered the town, one of the oldest and largest in Nicaragua, and though completely inland, containing, with its suburbs, a population of 20,000. We rode to the house of Don Sabino Satroon, who lay, with his mouth open, snoring in a hammock; but his wife, a pretty young half-blood, received me cordially, and with a proper regard for the infirmities of an old husband and for me, did not wake him up. All at once he shut his mouth and opened his eyes, and gave me a cordial welcome. Don Sabino was a Colombian, who had been banished for ten years, as he said, for services rendered his country; and having found his way to Masaya, had married the pretty young half-breed, and set up as a doctor. Inside the door, behind a little stock of sugar, rice, sausages, and chocolate, was a formidable array of jars and bottles, exhibiting as many colours and as puzzling labels as an apothecary's shop at home.

I had time to take a short walk around the town, and turning down the road, at the distance of half a mile came to the brink of a precipice, more than a hundred feet deep, at the foot of which, and a short distance beyond, was the Lake of Masaya. The descent was almost perpendicular, in one place by a rough ladder, and then by steps cut in the rock. I was obliged to stop while fifteen or twenty women, most of them young, passed. Their water-jars were made of the shell of a large gourd, round, with fanciful figures scratched on them, and painted or glazed, supported on the back by a strap across the forehead, and

secured by fine net-work. Below they were chattering gaily, but by the time they reached the place where I stood they were silent, their movements very slow, their breathing hard, and faces covered with profuse perspiration. This was a great part of the daily labour of the women of the place, and in this way they procured enough for domestic use; but every horse, mule, or cow was obliged to go by a circuitous road of more than a league for water. Why a large town has grown up and been continued so far from this element of life, I do not know. The Spaniards found it a large Indian village, and as they immediately made the owners of the soil their drawers of water, they did not feel the burden; nor do their descendants now.

In the meantime my guide arrived, who, to my great satisfaction, was no less a personage than the alcalde himself. The arrangements were soon made, and I was to join him the next morning at his house in Nindiri. I gave my mules and Nicolas a day's rest, and started on Don Sabino's horse, with a boy to act as guide and to carry a pair of alforgas with provisions. In half an hour I reached Nindiri, having met more people than on my whole road from San José to Nicaragua. The alcalde was ready, and in company with an assistant, who carried a pair of alforgas with provisions and a calabash of water, all mounted, we set out. At the distance of half a league we left the main road, and turned off on a small path in the woods on the left. We emerged from this into an open field covered with lava, extending to the base of the volcano in front and on each side as far as I could see, black, several feet deep, and in some places lying on high ridges. A faint track was beaten by cattle over this plain of lava. In front were two volcanoes, from both of which streams of lava had run down the sides into the plain. That directly in front my guide said was the Volcano of Masaya. In that on the right, and furthest from us, the crater was broken, and the great chasm inside was visible. This he said was called Ventero, a name I never heard before, and that it was inaccessible. Riding toward that in front, and crossing the field of lava, we reached the foot of the volcano. Here the grass was high, but the ground was rough and uneven, being covered with decomposed lava. We ascended on horseback, until it became too steep for the horses to carry us, and then dismounted, tied them to a bush, and continued on foot. I was already uneasy as to my guides' knowledge of localities, and soon found that they were unwilling or unable to endure much fatigue. Before we were half way up they disencumbered themselves of the water-jar and provisions, and yet they lagged behind. The alcalde was a man about forty, who rode his own horse, and being a man of consequence in the town, I could not order him to go faster; his associate was some ten years older, and

physically incapable; and seeing that they did not know any particular path, I left them and went alone.

At eleven o'clock, or three hours from the village of Nindiri, I reached the high point at which we were aiming; and from this point I expected to look down into the crater of the volcano; but there was no crater, and the whole surface was covered with gigantic masses of lava, and overgrown with bushes and scrub trees. I waited till my guides came up, who told me that this was the Volcano of Masaya, and that there was nothing more to see. The alcalde insisted that two years before he had ascended with the cura, since deceased, and a party of villagers, and they all stopped at this place. I was disappointed and dissatisfied. Directly opposite rose a high peak, which I thought, from its position, must command a view of the crater of the other volcano. I attempted to reach it by passing round the circumference of the mountain, but was obstructed by an immense chasm, and returning, struck directly across. I had no idea what I was attempting. The whole was covered with lava lying in ridges and irregular masses, the surface varying at every step, and overgrown with trees and bushes. After an hour of the hardest work I ever had in my life, I reached the point at which I aimed, and, to my astonishment, instead of seeing the crater of the distant volcano, I was on the brink of another.

Among the recorded wonders of the discoveries in America, this mountain was one; and the Spaniards, who in those days never stopped half way in any matter that touched the imagination, called it *El Infierno de Masaya*, or the Hell of Masaya. The historian, in speaking of Nicaragua, says, "There are burning mountains in this province, the chief of which is Masaya, where the natives at certain times offered up maids, throwing them into it, thinking by their lives to appease the fire, that it might not destroy the country, and they went to it very cheerful;" and in another place he says, "Three leagues from the city of Masaya is a small hill, flat and round, called Masaya, being a burning mountain, the mouth of it being half a league in compass, and the depth within it 250 fathoms. There are no trees nor grass, but birds build without any disturbance from the fire. There is another mouth like that of a well about a bowshot over, the distance from which to the fire is about 150 fathoms, always boiling up, and that mass of fire often rises, and gives a great light, so that it can be seen at a considerable distance. It moves from one side to the other, and sometimes roars so loud that it is dreadful, yet never casts up anything but smoke and flame. The liquor never ceasing at the bottom, nor its boiling, imagining the same to be gold, *F. Blase de*

Yniesta, of the Order of *St. Dominick*, and two other *Spaniards*, were let down into the first mouth in two baskets, with a bucket made of one piece of iron, and a long chain to draw up some of that fiery matter, and know whether it was metal. The chain ran 150 fathoms, and as soon as it came to the fire, the bucket melted, with some links of the chain, in a very short time, and therefore they could not know what was below. They lay there that night without any want of fire or candles, and came out again in their baskets sufficiently frightened."

Either the monk, disappointed in his search for gold, had fibbed, or nature had made one of its most extraordinary changes. The crater was about a mile and a half in circumference, five or six hundred feet deep, with sides slightly sloping, and so regular in its proportions that it seemed an artificial excavation. The bottom was level, both sides and bottom covered with grass, and it seemed an immense conical green basin. There were none of the fearful marks of a volcanic eruption; nothing to terrify, or suggest an idea of an *el inferno*; but, on the contrary, it was a scene of singular and quiet beauty. I descended to the side of the crater, and walked along the edge, looking down into the area. Toward the other end was a growth of *arbolitos* or little trees, and in one place no grass grew, and the ground was black and loamy, like mud drying up. This was perhaps the mouth of the mysterious well that sent up the flame, which gave its light a "considerable distance," into which the Indian maidens were thrown, and which melted the monk's iron bucket. Like him, I felt curious to "know what was below;" but the sides of the crater were perpendicular. Entirely alone, and with an hour's very hard work between me and my guides, I hesitated about making any attempt to descend, but I disliked to return without. In one place, and near the black earth, the side was broken, and there were some bushes and scrub trees. I planted my gun against a stone, tied my handkerchief around it as a signal of my whereabouts, and very soon was below the level of the ground. Letting myself down by the aid of roots, bushes, and projecting stones, I descended to a scrub tree which grew out of the side about half way from the bottom, and below this it was a naked and perpendicular wall. It was impossible to go any further. I was even obliged to keep on the upper side of the tree, and here I was more anxious than ever to reach the bottom; but it was of no use. Hanging midway, impressed with the solitude and the extraordinary features of a scene upon which so few human eyes have ever rested, and the power of the great Architect who has scattered his wonderful works over the whole face of the earth, I could not but reflect, what a waste of the bounties of Providence in this favoured but miserable land!

At home this volcano would be a fortune; with a good hotel on the top, a railing round to keep children from falling in, a zigzag staircase down the sides, and a glass of iced lemonade at the bottom. Cataracts are good property with people who know how to turn them to account. Niagara and Trenton Falls pay well, and the owners of volcanoes in Central America might make money out of them by furnishing facilities to travellers. This one could probably be bought for ten dollars, and I would have given twice that sum for a rope, and a man to hold it. Meanwhile, though anxious to be at the bottom, I was casting my eyes wistfully at the top. The turning of an ankle, breaking of a branch, rolling of a stone, or a failure of strength, might put me where I should have been as hard to find as the government of Central America. I commenced climbing up, slowly and with care, and in due time hauled myself out in safety.

On my right was a full view of the broken crater of the Volcano of Nindiri. The side toward me was hurled down, and showed the whole interior of the crater. This the *alcalde* had declared inaccessible; and partly from sheer spite against him, I worked my way to it with extreme labour and difficulty. At length, after five hours of most severe toil among the rugged heaps of lava, I descended to the place where we had left our provisions. Here I seized the calabash of water, and stood for several minutes with my face turned up to the skies, and then I began upon the *alcalde* and the *eatables*. Both he and his companion expressed their utter astonishment at what I described, and persisted in saying that they did not know of the existence of such a place.

I was too indignant with the *alcalde* to have anything further to do with him; and bent upon making another attempt, on my return to the village I rode to the house of the *cura*, to obtain his assistance in procuring men and making other needful preparations. On the steps of the back piazza I saw a young negro man, in a black gown and cap, sitting by the side of a good-looking, well-dressed white woman, and, if I mistake not, discoursing to her of other things than those connected with his priestly duties. His black reverence was by no means happy to see me. I asked him if I could make an inn of his house, which, though it sounds somewhat free, is the set phrase for a traveller to use; and, without rising from his seat, he said his house was small and incommodious, and that the *alcalde* had a good one. He was the first black priest I had seen, and the only one in the country who failed in hospitality. I must confess that I felt a strong impulse to lay the butt of a pistol over his head; and spurring my horse so that he sprang almost upon him, I wheeled short and galloped out of the

yard. With the alcalde and the cura both against me, I had no chance in the village. It was nearly dark, and I returned to Masaya. My vexation was lost in a sense of overpowering fatigue. It would be impossible to repeat the severe labour of the day, without an interval of rest, and there was so much difficulty in making arrangements, that I determined to mount my macho and push on.

The next morning I resumed my journey. My mules had not been watered. To send them to the lake and back would give them a journey of two leagues; and to save them I bought water, which was measured out in a gourd holding about a quart. At about a league's distance we came in sight of the Lake of Managua, and before us the whole country was a bed of lava from the base of the volcano to the lake.

In about three hours, after a desperately hot ride, we reached Managua, beautifully situated on the banks of the lake. Entering through a collection of thatched huts, we passed a large aristocratic house, with a courtyard occupying a whole square, the mansion of an expatriated family, decayed and going to ruin.

Late in the afternoon I walked down to the lake. It was not so grand as the Lake of Nicaragua, but it was a noble sheet of water, and in full sight was the Volcano of Momotombo. The shore presented the same animated spectacle of women filling their water-jars, men bathing, horses and mules drinking, and in one place was a range of fishermen's huts; on the edge of the water, stakes were set up in a triangular form, and women with small hand-nets were catching fish, which they threw into hollow places dug, or rather scraped, in the sand. The fish were called sardinitos, and at the door of the huts the men were building fires to cook them. The beauty of this scene was enhanced by the reflection that it underwent no change. Here was perpetual summer; no winter ever came to drive the inhabitants shivering to their fires; but still it may be questioned whether, with the same scenery and climate, wants few and easily supplied, luxuriating in the open air, and by the side of this lovely lake, even the descendants of the Anglo-Saxon race would not lose their energy and industry.

At three o'clock the next morning we started. In all the *tierras calientes* it is the custom to travel at night, or rather very early in the morning. At eight o'clock we entered the village of Mateares, where we procured some eggs, and breakfasted. From this village our road lay directly along the lake, but a few paces from the shore, and shaded by noble trees. Unfortunately, we were obliged to turn off to avoid a large rock which had rolled down several months before, and probably

blocks up the road still. This brought us round by the Cuesta del Relox, so called from a venerable sun-dial which stands on one side of the road, of a dark grey stone, with an inscription in Castilian, but the characters so worn and indistinct that I could not make them out. It has no history, except that it was erected by the conquerors; and it stands as an indication of the works with which the Spaniards began the settlement of the country.

At half-past eleven we left the lake for the last time, and entered an open plain. We rode an hour longer, and reached Nagarotis, a miserable village, its houses partly built of mud, with yards in front, trodden bare by mules, and baked white by the sun. I entered one of the houses for shelter, and found in it a young negro priest, on his way to Carthagena, with orders from the Church at Leon. The house was occupied by an old man alone. It had a bedstead, with a mat over it, upon which I lay down, glad to rest awhile, and to escape the scorching heat. Opposite the bed was a rude frame, about six feet high, on the top of which was a sort of baby-house, with the figure of the Virgin sitting on a chair, and dressed in cheap finery.

At three we started again. The sun had lost some of its force, the road was wooded, and I observed more than the usual number of crosses. The people of Nicaragua are said to be the worst in the republic. The inhabitants of the other States always caution a stranger against them, and they are proportionally devout. Everywhere, in the cities and country, on the tops of mountains, and by the side of rivers, these memorials stared me in the face. I noticed one in a cleared place by the roadside, painted black, with a black board suspended to it, containing an inscription in faded white letters; it had been erected to the memory of a padre, who had been murdered and buried at its foot. I stopped to copy the inscription, and while so engaged saw a travelling party approaching, and, knowing the jealousy of the people, shut my note-book and rode on. The party consisted of two men, with their servants, and a woman. The younger man accosted me, and said that he had seen me at Grenada, and regretted that he had not known of my proposed journey. From the style of his dress and equipments, I supposed him to be a gentleman, and was sure of it from the circumstance of his carrying a gamecock under his arm. As we rode on, the conversation turned upon these interesting birds, and I learned that my new acquaintance was going to Leon to fight a match, of which he offered to give me notice. The bird which he carried had won three matches in Grenada; its fame had reached Leon, and drawn forth a challenge from that place. It was rolled up as carefully as a fractured leg, with nothing but the head and tail

visible; and, suspended by a string, was as easily carried as a basket. The young man sighed over the miseries of the country, the distress and ruin caused by the wars; and represented the pit at Grenada as being in a deplorable condition; but in Leon he said it was very flourishing, on account of its being the head-quarters of the military. The building, too, did honour to the city: it was only open on Sundays; but he knew the proprietor, and could at any time make an arrangement for a match. He made many inquiries about the state of the science in my country; told me that he had imported two cocks from England, which were game enough, but not sufficiently heavy for theirs; and gave me, besides, much valuable information on this subject, of which I neglected to make any memorandum.

Before dark we reached Pueblo Nuevo, and all went to the same posada. His companion was not so much of a sportsman, though he knew the qualities of a good bird, and showed a familiarity in handling them. It was the first time I had fallen in with travellers for the night. I have avoided details in all places where I was partaking of private hospitality, but this was like a hotel at home, in the main point, that all were expected to pay. We had for supper poached eggs and beans, without plate, knife, fork, or spoon. My companions used their tortillas to take up an egg, and also, by turning up the edges, to scoop out frigoles from the dish; withal, they were courteous and gentlemanly. We had a species of chocolate, made of pounded cocoa, and sweetened, and served in kickories, which, having bottoms like the ends of large eggs, could not stand on the table. My companions twisted their pocket-handkerchiefs, and winding them on the table in circular folds, set the kickories inside the hollow, and one of them did the same with my handkerchief for me. After supper the younger of the two dressed the birds in their *robes de nuit*, a cotton cloth wound tight around the body, compressing the wings, and then, with a string fastened to the back of the cloth, so that the body was balanced, hooked each of them to the hammock. While he was preparing them the woman was showing horn combs, beads, earrings, and rosaries, and entrapped the daughter of the host into the purchase of a comb. The house had an unusual influx of company. The young man, the female merchant, and I do not know how many of the family, slept in a back room. The elder traveller offered me a hammock, but I preferred the long chest, made from the trunk of a tree, which in every house in Nicaragua served as sort of cupboard.

CHAPTER XX.

BEAUTIFUL PLAIN—LEON—STROLL THROUGH THE TOWN—BANEFUL EFFECTS OF PARTY-SPIRIT—SCENES OF HORROR—UNPLEASANT INTELLIGENCE—JOURNEY CONTINUED—A FASTIDIOUS BEGGAR—CHINANDEGA—GULF OF CONCHAGUA—VISIT TO REALEJO—COTTON FACTORY—HARBOUR OF REALEJO—EL VIEJO—PORT OF NAGUISCOLO—IMPORTANCE OF A PASSPORT—EMBARKING MULES—A BUNGO—VOLCANO OF COSEGUINA—ERUPTION OF 1835—LA UNION.

AT two o'clock we were awakened by the crowing of the cocks, and at three the cargo-mules were loaded, and we set off. The road was level and wooded, but desperately dusty. For two hours after daylight we had shade, when we came upon an open plain, bounded on the Pacific side by a low ridge, and on the right by a high range of mountains, forming part of the great chain of the Cordilleras. Before us, at a great distance, rising above the level of the plain, we saw the spires of the Cathedral of Leon. This magnificent plain, in richness of soil not surpassed by any land in the world, lay as desolate as when the Spaniards first traversed it. The dry season was near its close; for four months there had been no rain, and the dust hung around us in thick clouds, hot and fine as the sands of Egypt. At nine o'clock we reached Leon, and I parted with my companions, but not without a courteous invitation from the younger to take up my rest at the house of his brother. The suburbs were more miserable than anything I had yet seen. Passing up a long street, across which a sentinel was patrolling, I saw in front of the quartel a group of vagabond soldiers, a match for Carrera's, who cried out insolently, "Quita el sombrero," "Take off your hat." I had to traverse the whole extent of the city before I reached the house to which I had been recommended. I dismounted, and entered it with confidence of a warm reception; but the lady, with considerable expedition, told me that her husband was not at home. I gave her a note with which I had been furnished, addressed to herself; but she said she could not read English, and handed it back. I translated it word for word, being a request that she would give me lodgings. Her brow actually knit with vexation; and she said she had but one spare room, and that was reserved for the English vice-consul from Realejo. I answered that the vice-consul did not intend leaving Realejo for the present. She asked me how long I intended to stay; and when I replied, only that night, she said that if such were the case I might remain. The reader will perhaps wonder at my want of spirit; but the fact is, I was loth to con-