

ACROSS THE Isthmus

By Captain W. S. Journal.

After an agreeable voyage of fourteen days in the steamer *California* from San Francisco, in the early part of March last, we entered the large bay which leads to the city of Panama. It was necessary to pass between islands and narrow channels, yet all possessing the same character, steep hills covered with a thin brownish vegetation, fringed round their basis with cocoa-nut palms, these beautiful trees extending from high-water mark up some precipitous ravines, till one was broken or terminated by some intervening ridge. One of these islands at the entrance of the bay is notorious for its water-snakes; indeed, we saw two or three in the water as we steamed by. The *California* came to anchor about two miles from Panama, the water being too shallow to admit large vessels nearer. It was stated that the railway company had purchased a small island near our anchorage for a very large dock, and intended running out their road over miles of it, in order to make it their Pacific terminus.

Having engaged one of a swarm of boats which came off for the passengers, we had to strive hard against a head-wind and rough water for some time before we got on. Instead of our difficulties, however, being over when we stepped ashore, we discovered many more lying in wait for us that we had not at all anticipated. As soon as the boat struck the beach, twenty black fellows surrounded us, every one seizing and carrying off portions of our luggage amidst a din of yells; it was a scene that would serve for a finish to Milton's Pandemonium.

An Irish lady who accompanied us, after having spoken Spanish, beginning with "¿quién es Dios?" her line was broken, and she found the only means of relieving her mind was by scolding lustily in English; and if the niggers did not understand her language, they soon did her looks. With the most obstinate obstinacy, she scattered her baggage into a heap, on which I left my rifle armed with a revolver, sitting back to back with our Irish friend, whilst I ran up town to see what next could be done. It had been a busy day for Panama. The "Typhoon" Dock was being broken up, and San Francisco, and two had arrived on the Atlantic side from New York with many passengers; the streets were full of travellers, and I began to despair of getting males, or other means of conveyance, at any price. Succeeding at last, I hastened with a bevy of Indian porters to relieve the sentinels on the beach, who, I found, had vainly maintained their position.

The next source of anxiety was our luggage for the night, which was full to overflowing: the floors, the tables, and even the passages, were all taken. We wandered about for two hours, houseless and friendless; night was drawing his dusky mantle over the town, and the only accommodation we could have of a whole road-side house two miles off. As we stood, undecided and hungry, at a corner of the street, whom should we meet but our Prussian friend Jacobi; he had been equally unsuccessful in obtaining a place by his head; and, growing more impatient, he said that we should try to find out a German acquaintance of his, who had attended him as his physician some twelve years before in New Orleans. Little as there was in the hope of meeting him, we went on to the doctor's. German acquaintances gave us the search, and actually in Panama. We entered the court of a large house, ascended a broad old-fashioned staircase, and were taken to a large room, where we were. Our situation was soon understood; and in less than time I can write it, we were rescued from our homeless and almost alarming position by the disinterested kindness of a doctor, whose name I much regret have forgotten. The first step was to get about setting out for a ball; but before doing so, she saw that every arrangement was made for our comfort. It appeared that Madame Pfeiffer had, a short time before, partaken of their hospitality. We had to rise at five to be ready to start at daylight; and notwithstanding Mrs.—had been in bed but two hours, she was up and had breakfast ready for us. I appreciate such attentions more highly than any other:

they are the very essence of kindness. They are to be compared neither with the empty phrases of civility, with which many cloak their cold-heartedness, nor with what is little better—a welcome given only, when you make no calls on the personal attentions of your friends, and put them to no domestic inconvenience.

As we had some of a group of forty or fifty mule-rendezvous, gangs of these animals clustered past us over the pavement, having just returned from a journey to Gorgona. They were to be again packed off on a similar journey, some fed and some fasting; no matter, two owners remain the first cook of the mule, and if he broke down or died on the road, the traveller had to get on as well as he could without him. The shabby creatures I had selected for myself and wife are the best of a group of forty or fifty cost 26 dollars each for the ride; and, in addition to this, I had to pay 15 cents (8d.) a pound for the transmission of our luggage. It was daylight when we emerged from the walled town through one of its gates, and the inhabitants, and some of the riders much more anxious to get on than the ridden. Panama has a singularly antique appearance for a city in the New World, being made up of tall houses and narrow streets, the balconies of the upper stories approaching so close to the two sides of the way as almost to shut out the sky. Here you may see the women lounging over the railing, and enjoying a little chat with their neighbours. Those I saw were decidedly more than they are, and of anything like good looks. There is an antiquated air about many of the Spanish-American towns, the result not only of the absence of modern improvements, but of the ruinous condition of many of the buildings, and the inhabitation of them. I caught the ancient look, as some insects take their color from the spot they live in. The suburbs of Panama consist of tinted cottages, and extend along the road for a mile, with a few scattered orange and cocoa-nut or other palms. As we rode on, we saw women at almost every door lustily pounding their breakfast in large wooden mortars, the material being 'guessed' by a fellow who, as the inhabitants of the spot are, these people were very dark, and many evidently a cross between the Indian and negro. Escaping at last from human habitations, we exchanged a wide and level road for one tortuous and hilly, and often contracting so much that the carriage could pass at once; the tall trees frequently arched across the way, and beautiful tropical plants clothed the banks in endless variety. As we trotted on in single-file, a large stone, which was lying on the side of the road, became completely isolated from the rest, and might have been knocked down and dragged aside by robbers without being seen by his companions. The large stones with which the road had in many places been originally paved had worked out, and it presented even now, in the dry season, a surface as little easy to describe as it was to travel. Many of the steep ravines passing between cliffs in the rocks were worn by mule's feet into a sort of winding staircase.

We now first met the van of those emigrants on their way to California, who had arrived at Aspinwall a day or two before from New York; the majority of those were females, and some of the travelling for the saddle, far easier mode than the travelling for indifferent riders than on the common side-saddle. All kinds of 'fixings' were worn by these temporary Amazons; but the most fashionable kind of head-dress was a broad flat-topped hat, which was bound up and tied down over the nose with a string. For three or four hours we were meeting a continuous stream of people, with the invariable inquiry: 'How far is it to Panama?' Many were obliged by poverty to walk, and some of the men had a long staff, and were walking with a heavy club in her arms, and with probably all her worldly goods tied up in a handkerchief. At one place we found a woman, with four children, lying on a bank; she had missed her husband, and for fear of being lost, she had started out to be arranged to walk with these young creatures—having set out on the previous morning—more than seventy-five miles, with no more food or shelter than what she had been char-

tably afforded her by travellers at the roadside. These houses were entertained on the thatched roofs stuck upon poles—are met with every five or six miles; and the airy style of their architecture is probably suggested by the warmth of the climate. A huge calico sign, however, informed you that there was nothing under the hotel; and I must say, that the best glass of London stout I ever relished, was drunk at the Union. Excepting these places, there are no vestiges of human habitation or of cultivation to be seen.

As we had a deep at the bottom of all; and then all that is visible consists of mountains thickly covered with forests. We by this time began to experience the greatest nuisance on the whole journey—breeze-trains of mules, driven from hill-side to hill-side, with large and heavy boxes overhauling their saddles, and in narrow parts of the road dashing against everything before them. It was twice knocked over by these packages; and a lady who met, carried off her hat, and lost her hair broken by them. A very pretty accident was shortly afterwards avoided, through the trappings of my mule chancing to be worn out. I had just entered a ravine, so narrow that it was necessary to have the mule's feet under the mule's belly, to prevent their hitching in the rocks, when I was suddenly confronted by a well-mounted lady. We both pulled back lustily; but the mules, having no mouths, probably thought it might go down, and the mule's head and sides came into collision, and things became thoroughly desperate—when span went my girth, and I quietly slid, saddle and all, over the mule's tail. I looked round for the fair champion, who had risen over her mule, and the satisfaction of seeing her make me a smiling adieu, as she disappeared behind a mass of rock.

At last we caught sight of some smoke in a distant valley, and soon the note of the bell was heard, and the stopping place. After several ups and downs, and a track just cleared through the woods, and some plunges through stagnant water in the valleys, we reached the railway terminus near Gorgona, Forget, ladies and gentlemen, and as few persons were killed. We are now on a far more comfortable road, and the Great Western, North Western, or any other terminus, and picture to yourselves the following items:—A large open space, covered with tired travellers and worn-out mules; a long train of carriages or cars, extending for miles; a long railway filled with passengers, and a long wooden shed, the hotel, into which we were delighted to have the privilege of entering. The gratification we experienced on at last reaching an accommodation, and the relief of resting, was intense. It was past three o'clock, and having eaten nothing since the morning, we were anticipating a hearty dinner—when already, before accomplishing the demolition of some vermicelli-soup, the railway-bell was again rung, and the train started, and we were told that two hours would take us to Aspinwall, where the steamer *Gorge-Lane* awaited us. We soon had a view of the Chagres river, up which deadly steam all passengers had to boat it, till the railway was only a few rods from the water. The wreck of a small steamer and a broken barge; and a little further on, some railway-bars come upwards. The accident indicated by the latter was a very trivial one, we were told; it occurred yesterday, and only a few persons were killed. We are now on a far more pleasant road, with the swamp some twenty feet below us on each side. It is said that the number of labourers, principally Irish, who have perished in making this part of the road, is so great that they could almost be digested into a soup.

But the course of American railways seldom runs down smooth; and with us, after a series of bumps, which knocked the passengers together, the train came to a standstill. The lady who had a long staff, and who fortunately pulled up in time, to avoid repetition of yesterday's little accident. It grew dark, yet we had to sit, hour after hour, waiting for relief from Aspinwall, with nothing to quench our thirst but the swamp water, which we dared not touch. One passenger wished his horse home with his poor old mother, with only a corn-cake to eat; and another amused us with a

relation of his smart dealings in crossing the Isthmus. It appears, that instead of giving up his hired mule at the end of his journey, he had relet her to a passenger proceeding back to Panama, and had not only paid his expenses, but gained a few dollars by the sale of the mule. As soon as it was dark, the wild beasts began to entertain us with their cries: one big fellow, probably a pan-a, occasionally roared so as to make the car-sashes rattle; and this was kept up within a few feet of us, until the day broke, and the sun came out. Our roaring acquaintance, on hearing the steam-whistle, evidently thought this second lion a bore, for we heard him rush away through the jungle, with doubtless his tail between his legs. After sundown, we were glad to reach Aspinwall at midnight, and to recruit our weariness in a large and handsome hotel.

In concluding this rough account of a rough day's journey, when it is remembered, that we had, as travellers, everything to do, and that we had to see a fine cool weather, and more than half the distance across (some fifty-five miles) in railway-cars—how pitiable must have been the condition of those who crossed the Isthmus in the old way, and those who were with us took three days! How many have I seen in California laid low by the Panama fever, who were shovelled out of the crowded ships to die, with the implied, if not expressed remark, the sooner the better! Unfortunately, almost all who arrived at San Francisco were penniless, and most of those who had any strength attempted, therefore, to push on to the Diggings and it was wonderful to look on the determination and indomitable energy of men—hardly to be believed, and who were with us, who had nothing to trust to but the charitable kindness of the doctor and the generosity of the hotel-keeper. The Panama Railway is a great undertaking; and although thousands of lives have already been sacrificed, and the result of the enterprise, when completed, will be greater, when contrasted with the previous mode of travelling, than those of any other railway in the world.

We reached New York after a delightful voyage, and were met by friends at Jamaica in the *Gorge Lane*. Both the ship and its captain deserve the highest commendation.

A VISIT TO HUMBOLDT

An American gentleman, writing from Berlin furnishes the following account of his visit to the world:

"We rang, showed the servants our cards, who, after looking at them, showed us through the entry into a little room filled with stuffed birds and animals, and a few great coats, passed through another room filled, mule-like as the other, and from that into the room where Humboldt was sitting. He came immediately forward, took our hands, and expressed his pleasure at seeing us, had insisted on seating us on the sofa, while he took out a chair, and we sat down to the end of it. He began at first to speak in French, but after having got half way through a sentence turned into English, which he speaks very well, and in a few minutes he was gone. He talked rapidly and fluently, and with but a slight accent.

Humboldt's personal appearance is very remarkable. He is very small and but for a man of his age, (he is eighty-five,) he looked uncommonly well. He wore a large white necktie, a curly colored and figured velvet waistcoat, and a dress coat. Old as he is, he still keeps up the habits of his earlier years, sleeps but little, works incessantly, and is fond of society. He was engaged upon the fourth volume of his *Cosmos*."

AN AFFECTING INCIDENT.—A seaman of the fleet before Sebastopol, whose family lives at Polperro, in this county, was ordered on shore for the purpose of assisting in the defence of the town, when he was slain who fell in a late attack of the Russians on the British batteries; and almost the first person he met with on landing was one of his sons, who had been ordered to the front before he was informed, and who had been severely wounded in the late engagement. From him he learnt that his two other brothers were all slain, and that his eldest son had been with him but he remained, till he saw him expire. He then proceeded on the duty for which he had been ordered, and soon discovered the bodies of his other brothers, and was glad to see that he had been killed. His feelings may be imagined, as he assisted in laying these three brothers of his side, in one grave.—*Cornwall Royal Gazette*.