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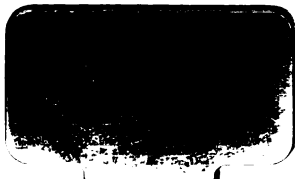
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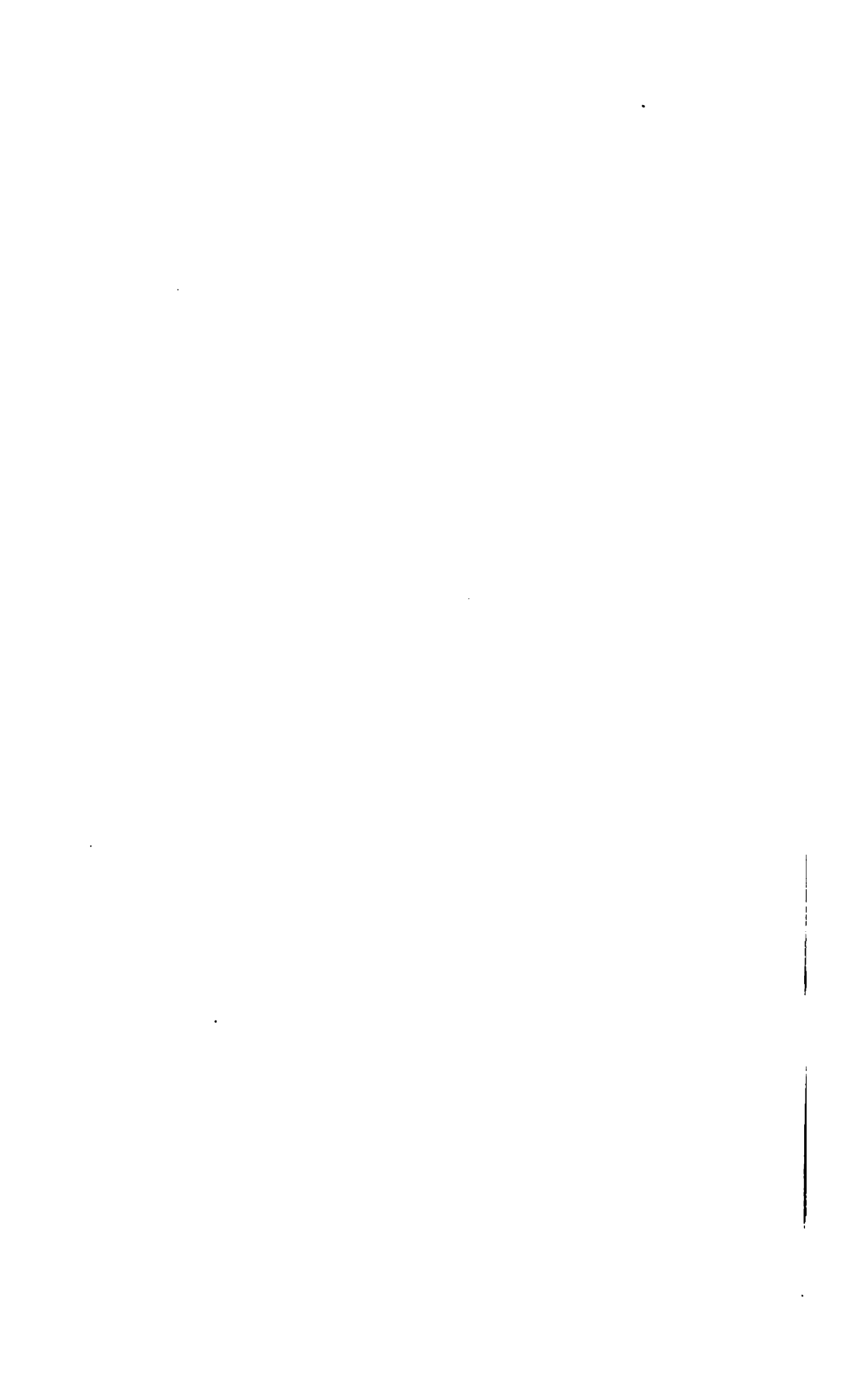


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A  
DESCRIPTION  
OF THE  
VALLEY OF BOGOTA,  
AND THE  
FALLS OF TECUENDAMA,  
IN THE  
REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA.

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BY WILLIAM D. ROBINSON.

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BOGOTA, 11th April, 1824.

After taking a collation at my quarters, our party, consisting of Col's. Hamilton and Campbell, their Secretary, Mr. Cade, Mr. Santa Maria, Doctor Maine, and myself, proceeded about 4 o'clock in the afternoon on an excursion to the country, for the purpose of viewing the falls, or Salto of *Tecuendama*—at about 6 o'clock we reached the village of *Suacha*, distant 5 leagues, laying about W. by S. of Bogota.—Here we were accommodated with lodgings for the night by Friar *Candia*, guardian and provincial of the order of San Francisco. This worthy man received us with a cordiality and frankness which indicated his knowledge of the world, and liberal mind; and, in fact, we all felt as much at home as in the mansion of an English country gentleman; even the brethren of the order, who were present, seemed to partake of the character of their superior, and had nothing of the authority and reserve usually found among the disciples of St. Francis.

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Friar Candia was one of those who had distinguished himself in favour of the republican system, and had suffered imprisonment and persecution during the reign of Morillo and other royal chiefs, and was now considered an apostle of liberty as well as of religion. He was about 35 years old, urbane and frank in his deportment, and appeared eminently calculated to promote that change in society which accorded with the views of a liberal government, and in unison with the spirit of the age. A few of these kind of men would be of more utility to the infant government and institution of Colombia, than a thousand legislators, because, by a long course of habit, they have acquired a powerful influence over the minds and actions of the community; an influence which requires time, perseverance, and talent to destroy; hence such men as Friar Candia, are important instruments in effecting the desirable change in society so essential among the population of Colombia. A village or district in which an enlightened and liberal priest resides, already exhibits the beneficial effects of the new system; but in those districts where an intolerant and avaricious friar or clergyman dwells, ignorance, misery, and fanaticism prevails in the same degree as two centuries ago; and unfortunately for Colombia, the majority of the priesthood, I fear, belong to the latter class.









The next morning we proceeded on our jaunt to the Salto ; it is about two leagues from *Suacha*, and the course about W. by N. Half a league from the village, we came to the fertile and valuable Hacienda, called *Canoas*, whose proprietor derives a revenue, from the culture of wheat and the pasturage of cattle, of more than \$20,000 annually ; but from the extent of the property, and fertility of its soil, it could, by industry and proper culture, be made to produce fifteen or twenty times more than its present revenue!! As we approached the foot of the mountains, we were enchanted with the beauty and native luxuriance of this part of the great valley of Bogota ; the river bearing that name, wound around us through the plain, in every direction of the compass ; the vivid and perpetual verdure of the scenery ; barley and wheat, in all their various stages of vegetation ; flocks of sheep, cattle, and horses, browsing in rich pastures, or roving on the declivities of the mountains, presented to all of us a rural scene, equally splendid as novel ; but when we had reached the summit of the mountains, and in the scope of our vision embraced the greater part of this delightful vale, the scene was magnificent, realizing all that poets have sung of the celebrated charms of Arcadia.—We beheld spacious lakes, and the river meandering below us ; and, altogether, we

enjoyed a view of this interesting plain and its adjacent mountains, perhaps to greater advantage than from any other position, at the same time inhaling an atmosphere as mild and salubrious as ever mortals breathed. We had no thermometer with us, but we judged the temperature at about 68 or 70° of Fahrenheit. The summit on which we enjoyed this prospect, was about 5 to 600 feet above the valley. Even the mountains which surround this charming place exhibited a scenery entirely new to us; they were clothed with down, or close herbage of perpetual green, and though many of them were elevated and romantic, yet they conveyed an idea of the sublime and beautiful without any of the terror of mountain scenes.

Within our view was a body of territory capable, under proper culture, of sustaining at least *three millions* of the human species—a population nearly equal to that of all the Republic of Colombia at present. At first view, this may appear an exaggerated statement, but when we reflect that the valley of Bogota is about 60 to 70 miles in length, and an average breadth of about 28 miles, that the mountains in every direction around this spacious vale, are capable of culture to their summits, and in their ravines; that it is situated in a climate without a parallel on the globe for serenity and salubrity; that even plants



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and animal common to Europe would here find a congenial soil and clime, we shall find that the idea of its sustaining in rural comfort a population of three millions of inhabitants, by no means extravagant. In France and the south of Europe, we find more than three millions of people sustained by agriculture in a much less space. Yet all this extensive plain and fertile mountains are nearly in the same virgin state as when first discovered by the Spaniards, and probably would have remained so many centuries longer, had the former and pernicious policy of Spain, continued to wither and blight all the great physical blessings of these regions.

While we indulged a sentiment of profound indignation on beholding the gloomy and fatal effects of Spanish policy, we were at the same time cheered with the future prospect which Columbian laws and a liberal policy would produce ere long in this highly favoured country, which, instead of being condemned as hitherto to remain inactive and useless, all this beautiful valley and surrounding mountains will become the abode of civilized man, yielding subsistence and felicity to upwards of three millions of inhabitants.

How different will be the future aspect of this valley, when the hand of industry and science spreads its advantages over the soil; when horticulture embellishes the country with modern im-

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provements ; and when, in fact, the whole of this vast plain becomes divided in small farms, with orchards of choice fruit trees, and beautiful cottages ; then, indeed, will the *Valley of Bogota* become a spot of residence truly desirable, and possessing more advantages as regards its soil and climate, than any other in Europe or the United States.

From the summit before mentioned, we gradually descended about five hundred and seventy feet, through forests of majestic trees, clothed with deep green, and where every inch of ground bore decisive evidences of exuberant vegetation, where every plant of the temperate zone would flourish in a kindred soil, but excepting one or two small spots in rude culture ; all the rest of this beautiful mountain region was as silent as the sepulchre, save only now and then, a bird of beautiful plumage caught our eyes in the thicket, or our ears with its melodious notes.

We reached a level spot, where we left our horses, and descended about 150 feet. Here the Salto of Tecuendama burst on our view : a small river about 40 yards wide, rushed down between two mountains, until it approached the edge of a precipice, where it precipitately discharged a column of water, about 25 yards in width and 10 in diameter, into the great abyss below. This chasm of the mountains is what is usually called

a *Barranca*; on both sides it was nearly perpendicular, consisting of layers of granite—its height was about 1,000 to 1,200 feet; above this body of stone, the country on each side was crowned with large forest trees, gradually rising to an immense height, and presenting the most splendid forest scene I ever beheld; at the spot where the water fell into the *Barranca*, was about 600 feet, according to the measurement of Humboldt—but many of the natives of Bogota give to the fall a much greater descent; but as Humboldt is in general accurate in his measurement of the various heights in America, and had the advantage of the best instruments, his account is much more to be relied on than the vague opinions of individuals.

It is absolutely impossible to describe the effect produced on the spectator on viewing this extraordinary Salto—neither is it in the power of language to depict, or the pencil of the painter to convey any just idea of the novelty and grandeur of the scene. I felt emotions of pleasure and surprize, mingled with the most profound awe. Some of the hardiest among us ventured to approach the edge of the precipice, but after a view of a few seconds into the great abyss below, involuntarily shrunk back. I found the safest and best mode was to crawl on my abdomen to the brink of the precipice, which I adopted, and

thus deliberately enjoyed a profile view of this stupendous Salto. I beheld a body of water, of the dimensions before described, falling in the air more than 600 feet perpendicularly; it resembled a dense body of falling snow in a storm; the rays of the sun striking into the foam and vapour, produced an infinite variety of rainbows, and eccentric appearances, excelling in novelty and grandeur all that the most vivid imagination can conceive. At the bottom of the Barranca, where the water fell, I expected a rapid torrent would have been produced, but the contrary is the fact, it being an ordinary stream gliding placidly over ledges of rocks. Humboldt accounts for this by supposing that the body of water, in its great descent in the air, is expended in vapour before it reaches the bottom of the Barranca.

Among the writings of this interesting and scientific traveller, there are some opinions and sentiments which I regret to see; and I feel the delicacy of intruding my humble opinions in opposition to a writer who has deservedly acquired so much celebrity in the literary world; but there are some things which he states as facts, that are so palpably absurd, I cannot forbear to notice: for instance, when speaking of the influence on the surrounding atmosphere, caused by the vapour from the Salto, he attributes to it the extraordinary fertility of the *Hacienda of Ca*.







*noas*—now this Hacienda is not only distant from the *Salto* near *two leagues*, but is moreover separated by a range of lofty mountains; and, besides, it is not a fact that the soil of this Hacienda surpasses in fertility the rest of this immense plain, for throughout its whole extent of 70 miles it bears the same evidences of luxuriant vegetation. The great Barranca, into which the fall discharges its water, appears to be the only region in which the vapour can have any influence, and it rarely is seen, even in this Barranca, to rise to its summit—it is expended and lost in this mighty mountain chasm.

I consider the fall of Tecuendama to be about 140 feet lower than the plain of Bogota. This plain, according to Humboldt, is 8,220 feet above the level of the sea, and throughout the whole year is blessed with a climate more pure and salubrious than I think is to be found in any other part of the earth, and has this peculiar advantage, that at a distance of not more than *one day's journey* from Bogota, you can raise all the productions of the tropics—hence the market of Bogota presents to the astonished stranger the spectacle of the various fruits of all the zones: here you have, every day of the year, strawberries, peaches, pears, and quinces, together with pine apples, oranges, and plantains; here you have wheat and all other species of grain, together

with sugar and coffee—all produced within a circumference of about sixty miles.

If this fine country offered no other inducement to the traveller, a visit to the plain of Bogota and the Salto of Tecuendama would afford him an ample remuneration for all his fatigues and privations.

The roar of the fall, the beauty, novelty, and sublimity of its appearance, the grandeur of the surrounding scenery, and the tout ensemble of the country, constitute a scene perfectly unique; and I can only add, that I would not have been without the peculiar delight which this great natural curiosity has afforded me for all the metallic wealth of Colombia, and I shall bear with me to the grave, the deep and interesting impression it has made on my mind.

WM. D. ROBINSON.

