

IN OLD CARTHAGENA

A City Hallowed by History, Romance and Tradition.

THE INQUISITION BUILDING

It is Now Used as a Tobacco Factory—An Ancient Castle as a Signal Station—Balboa's Reward.

CARTHAGENA, Colombia, March 13, 1890.—[Special correspondence of THE HERALD.]—One of the most interesting places in the Western Hemisphere is this ancient Carthagena, a city hallowed by history, romance and tradition, but now wearing an air of decayed gentility pitiable to behold. By consulting a map, you will find it near the Caribbean coast of Colombia, a little way west from the mouth of the Magdalena. In the days of Phillip II, it was the most strongly fortified city on the continent, the headquarters of the Spanish naval forces in the New World, the great rendezvous of the galleons that came for treasure, and until a comparatively late day it continued to be the principal commercial metropolis of the vast region known as "New Granada."

Its prominence was partly due to the celebrated mines just back of the town, from which many tons of gold were sent to Spain. Some idea of their richness may be imagined from reading the old records that yet remain in the archives of Carthagena. These documents set forth the fact that the King's share was one-fifth part of all the gold produced, while another fifth went to the church; and that, during more than two centuries, the King's portion amounted to several millions of dollars annually. Since human nature has been about the same through all the ages, it is not entirely certain that the share to his majesty considered himself a miserly monarch, and as tiredly up to the mark; but at any rate the galleons carried away tons upon tons of treasure. Hard and fast after the galleons followed

THE PIRATES for plunder; and so much damage did the latter commit that the Spanish sovereign thought it worth his while to build a wall around Carthagena, so wide and strong that forty horses could walk abreast on it, at an expense of more than ninety millions of dollars.

Though no longer occupied, the ancient fortifications are still in a tolerable good condition. Their massive walls are all appearance, impenetrable, and the subterranean passages leading from them may still be distinctly traced. Through one of these passages, which leads directly to the foot of the mountains, communication used to be maintained in time of siege. Another ran between an ancient fortress on a hill and the dungeons of the Inquisition, and through it prisoners were conducted from prison to punishment. If you have read Charles Kingsley's delightful story called "Westward, Ho!" you will remember that in it he describes Carthagena as a city which imprisons his hero and heroine, Frank and the Rose of Devon, in this same old fortress on the hillside. Through the underground passages we have just mentioned, the prisoners were dragged to the vaults of the Inquisition, where they endured tortures inconceivable and a terrible death by fire.

The Inquisition building still stands, but since the power of Catholicism was broken on this continent it has not been used for the torment of heretics. It remains empty for many years, but of late has served for the ignoble purpose of a tobacco factory. Some time ago a party of United States naval officers, finding time for a heavy on their hands while waiting in the harbor, attempted to explore Carthagena's underground passages; but they found them so full of obstructions and fallen debris that not much progress could be made.

Even the stately old castle, like everything else about the place, has fallen into a mournful condition. It is now utilized as a signal station, from which a flag is run up by a man on guard, as soon as a vessel is seen to enter the harbor, whereby the captain of the ship and the merchants of the city of its approach. There are several other fine but now dilapidated churches in Carthagena and many decrepit palaces, which, partially in ruins, indicate the magnificence of the old-time grandees. Many of the palaces are now empty, and others have degenerated into shabby tenement houses.

THE CATHEDRAL, though architecturally one of the largest to be found in the three Americas, is somewhat shabby by the standards of the world, mentioning, except the big marble pulpit. The latter is truly a magnificent affair, covered with exquisite carvings, and the good Carthagenians think, not without reason, that there is nothing like it under the sun. The story of its early vicissitudes adds to its value and interest. About three hundred years ago, the Pope of Rome, wishing to show a special favor to his devout subjects in "New Spain," ordered the construction of this marble pulpit for Carthagena's cathedral. It was designed and carved in Rome by the most artists of the day; and when properly consecrated, it was shipped with great ceremony on board a Spanish galleon bound for the western coast.

While on the way the vessel was overhauled by pirates, who ripped open the boxes containing the pulpit, and being angered at discovering the treasure therein for which therein for which they could find any use they dumped the whole thing overboard in mid-ocean. But—wonders of wonders!—by the intervention of the sea, not one of the pulpit's marble could be made to sink! The buccaners, frightened out of their wits by this miracle, fled from the ship, leaving by their booty. With great difficulty the Spanish sailors got their sacred cargo aboard again and started on their way. But they had not proceeded far before a second lot of sea robbers overtook them and burned the galleon, having made away with all its valuables and murdered every one of the crew.

However, the saints still preserve the precious pulpit, and while everything else was consumed or swallowed up by the greedy waves, it floated away serenely on the surface of the sea, guided by invisible hands finally went ashore on the unfrequented beach a few miles above Carthagena. In heretical minds the query may arise why the sea should have done this, or at least by landing the pulpit in the right spot while they were about it; but it is not your business nor mine to question the miracles.

For many years the beautifully carved marble lay on the desolate beach unknown and unnoticed, while waves drifted over it and waves occasionally washed them away, until one day a party of explorers stumbled upon it, who recognized at once the value of the work and took it on board their ship, which was bound for Spain, intending to sell it there for what it would bring. But it seems that

bottom with all on board. The miraculous pulpit arose from the wreck unharmed, and the day it came floating into the harbor of Carthagena and at last it was safely placed in the sanctuary for which it was intended, where it now remains. I am solemnly assured that the above account is absolutely correct, but, of course, there are no means of proving it, since all those concerned in the early history of the pulpit have been dust these two centuries and more.

There is a faint prospect that this old city of Carthagena may retrieve its fallen fortunes somewhat and become again a lively metropolis, two of the enterprises that are now being agitated do not prove abortive. One of them is the construction of a railroad between Barranquilla and Carthagena, along the old route of the ancient dique or ship canal between the latter place and Calamar, which formerly connected Carthagena with the Magdalena River, a point many miles above the delta. When Carthagena's decline began, about the beginning of the present century, the ship canal fell into disuse and Carthagena, losing the direct route to the sea, was left a remote and unimportant place. The old city has natural advantages, far superior to any other in Colombia, and should either of the above enterprises be carried out, it will again become the foremost city of the northern end of South America, within easy communication with the fertile valleys and plains of the Colombian interior, the gate of commerce in time of peace, and when war threatens secure alike from siege and unsuccessful assault.

I have been shown the crumbling old casa whereina

FASCIO NUNEZ DE BALBOA, the discoverer of the Pacific, lived in Carthagena before his short and somewhat questionable career of fame began. It seems that the gay young nobleman had quickly got rid of all his fortune in Old Castle, and soon after the return of Columbus from his fourth voyage he followed the tide of Spanish emigration to these shores to escape imprisonment for debt. In his new home he soon succeeded in leading his creditors with other liabilities, and his efforts were on the point of arresting him, when he hit upon the plan of escape which every schoolboy is familiar. As the story is neither long nor prosy and as its romance and tragedy is really a part of the history of Colombia and was enacted right here in the places we are visiting, shall we review it from the pages of history?

I think it was in the year 1510 that Martin Francisco, whose name was as closely wrought with early colonial doings in this section, came first to Carthagena, which even then was a thriving town. It was there he found a brigantine which contained the discouraged remnant of a Spanish colony that had been driven by the hostility of the Indians from their settlement a little farther down the coast. Its leader was no less a personage than Francisco Pizarro, who had not yet entered upon his career of bloodshed in Peru. Pizarro had been sailing for St. Sebastian and took Pizarro and his brigantine with him. Just before the vessel was to leave port some men brought on board an ordinary cask, supposed to contain provisions, but which was really a treasure chest with the rest of the cargo, but hardly had the shore faded from sight before out popped the head of this cask, followed by the figure of

A SPANISH CAVALIER, high-ruffed and gaudied, in gold-embroidered satin waistcoat, velvet breeches and top boots, no less a personage than the Spanish hero on whom Balboa's name is based. At first Enicisco was so angry at the deception practiced upon him that he threatened to put the stowaway ashore on a desert island, but he relented, when Balboa swore eternal allegiance and promised to be a good soldier in the murderous expedition then on the tapis—no doubt reflecting that he could not choose his followers from among the best of the colony.

On the way to St. Sebastian, Enicisco's ship ran upon the rocks and was lost with all its cargo, but most of the crew escaped to the shore. While in this sorry plight Balboa betwought himself of an Indian village on the banks of a river called Darien, where he had heard the land was fertile and the natives possessed plenty of gold; and he offered to conduct the adventurers thereto.

They easily captured the city of Darien and compelled the inhabitants to deliver up more than fifty thousand dollars worth of golden ornaments; after which Enicisco established a colony there and forbade anybody but himself to traffic with the natives, under penalty of death. This too arbitrary order caused a split in the hitherto peaceful party, for Enicisco's followers were quite as covetous as their leader. Headed by Balboa they joined in making this one of contention the basis of a revolt; and so well did Balboa manage matters that he was appointed governor of the colony, with absolute authority over it, while Enicisco was recalled to Spain in disgrace.

The new governor sent Pizarro to explore the neighboring provinces, and after that worthy had been driven back by the Indians, he headed a similar expedition himself. While cruising along these coasts of Colombia, he picked up two Spaniards in the dress of sailors, and the address of the Indians, who proved to be deserters from another Spanish colony and had long been living in an interior province under the protection of a great cacique named Careta. Though the latter had spared their worthless lives and treated them with unvarying kindness, they did not hesitate in offering to pilot Balboa to the Indian village, which they declared to contain a great store of the precious metal so ardently desired by the adventurers.

When the expedition reached CARETA'S CAPITAL, which lay about twenty miles above the mouth of the Caledonia river, near the present town called Careta, the chief received them in good faith and entertained them freely with the best his kingdom afforded, as long as they chose to stay. Finally Balboa, who had only 150 soldiers, pretended to leave, having spied out the land to his satisfaction; but the same night he returned, attacked the city and made prisoners of the kind cacique, his family and nobles. Careta at length made peace with the vipers he had nourished by yielding up a large amount of gold and giving his young and beautiful daughter in marriage to Balboa, who had already a wife in Spain and goodness knows how many others in the New World. However, it is said that the Indian spouse acquired a great influence over her lord, and saved his life on more than one occasion.

Having promised to help the father-in-law against his enemies Balboa went to a neighboring province and destroyed "Poncho's" village, where he had hoped to find a good deal of gold, but was disappointed. Then he went on to the territory of Comagre, a chief who was Careta's ally and who was inordinately vain. Comagre himself came out to meet them, escorted them to his village and loaded them with kindness. His people were first treated in a civilized manner, but the Spaniards had yet seen in America. The chief's residence was a frame building 450 feet long by 250 feet wide, divided into numerous apartments. Underneath the whole was a great cistern for storing provisions; and in one part was a mausoleum, where the bodies of Comagre's ancestors were preserved. The corpses were first dried in the sun to prevent decay, and then wrapped in great quantities of cloth, which was interwoven with threads of gold and silver and fastened here and there with native emeralds and lumps of gold.

hope of getting rid of the terrible guests, he offered to conduct them to it if they wished to go. Of course they wanted to, if gold was so plentiful, and Balboa hurried off to Darien to prepare for the expedition. He sent to Spain for the men required; and after waiting long and anxiously in vain, received word that Enicisco had re-established himself in the favor of the king, and was coming back at once to resume command of the colony. Balboa knew very well that if he left the cutches of his old enemy he would be sent home in chains to answer to the charge of treason. There was but one course to save his precious head and he lost no time in pursuing it—by calling upon volunteers to accompany him to the "great sea" and getting out of the way before Enicisco's arrival. Nearly two hundred men responded to his call and on the first of September, 1513, he set out with a brigantine and ten canoes. He crossed the domain of his father-in-law he tarried awhile and from that point the inland march began.

Space will not permit an account of how they toiled over rocks and hills and through the thick undergrowth of tropical forests, morasses and jungles, suffering at every step from sickness, hunger and the fierce opposition of the Indians. After many battles, in which the simple natives were always routed with fear at the first discharge of firearms—their believing the strange weapons to be thunder and lightning in human hands—the adventures reached the foot of the mountain from whose summit the great sea shrouded them that the ocean was visible. Determined to have

THE FIRST GLIMPSE of it himself, Balboa ordered a sick and wounded follower might have needed rest. At the first peep of day he prepared to ascend with sixty picked companions. It was high noon before they emerged from the dense forest and stood at the base of a stony peak that crowded the mountain top. Bidding the men remain until he gave them a signal, Balboa pushed forward alone until he reached the summit, and there below stretching away to the horizon, lay the mighty sea, whose shining waters had never before been beheld by the eye of a white man.

His followers dashed after him, Francisco Pizarro, constant companion and young priest, who at once set up the chant, "Te Deum Laudamus," in which all joined on bended knees. Then, as usual, they set about dividing the golden spoils, and by that means took formal possession of land and sea in the name of their King and the Pope.

To carry the story to its conclusion, the adventurers, after many hardships, returned to Darien; whence Balboa dispatched a ship to Spain with the news of his grand discovery and one who fitted out the gold he had taken. By this time Enicisco had returned to Spain and a new governor was in command at Darien. The latter had Balboa tried on a charge of treason; but he was acquitted and then started to carry out his intention of exploring the ocean he had named Pacific and finding the people who ate from plates of gold.

Crossing the mountains that form the backbone of the Isthmus, he built vessels on the banks of the Valsa river, visited the Pearl Islands, and then sailed against a cruise some distance down the coast. Meantime jealous enemies at home egged on by Enicisco, reported that he intended to set up a colony on the coast. Against the governor of Darien summoned Balboa back to his capital, ostensibly to hold trial, but really to deprive him of his office, and by that means took formal possession of land and sea in the name of their King and the Pope.

He was undoubtedly a great scamp, but averaged pretty well on the whole, for a sixteenth century crusader. His history indicates no display of heroism. Against and as a reward for his splendid discovery he fell victim to the same mean spirit of jealousy which caused Columbus to be carried in chains to the prison where he died.

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