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THE quaint historian, Diedrich Knickerbocker, says it was traditionary in his family, that when the worthy Master Hendrick Hudson first laid eyes upon the marvelous beauties of the great waters which now bear his honored name, astonishment and admiration wrung from his taciturn lips the remarkable exclamation, "See there!" That the susceptible navigator really did give expression to his unwonted emotions in these supreme terms, or at least "in words to that

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OMOA :

PICTURESQUE AND INCIDENTAL.

OF all the old towns and cities of the New World there are none, perhaps, of which so little is known as Omoa, Honduras, which deserves some notice from the historian or passing traveler for its picturesque position, its beautiful and perfectly secure harbor, its unrivaled river water; while the beautiful roads leading toward the ancient city of "Valladolid," now Comayagua, render it a spot of surpassing interest, needing but the questionable patronage of the moneyed traveler to trumpet it to the world as one of the few spots where the luxuries of the St. Nicholas may be forgotten amidst Nature's bountiful magnificence.

It is partially surrounded by hills covered with foliage seen nowhere except in the tropics. The surface of many colors is dotted by the graceful palm and cocoa-nut, with clumps of plantain-trees here and there breaking the uniformity of the hills with their heavy fan-like leaves, positively lending a coldness to the atmosphere during the heat of the day.

The harbor is almost land-locked. Perfectly secure except during the prevalence of the southwest winds, which, by-the-way, are so broken by the mountains around the town and along

the coast that they are an object of no attention to the vessels in port. And so seldom do they blow over the harbor, that they are mentioned as rare occurrences.

The Omoa River is beautiful in the extreme. Flowing quietly on for a distance beneath overhanging shrubbery of most gorgeous coloring, it breaks suddenly into a noisy stream, dashing over pebbles and rocks, forming itself into miniature cascades perfectly enchanting. Nor does its beauty appeal to the eye only. It is the Esculapius of the town. Far and near are its praises sounded by all lovers of "pure and sparkling water." From Vera Cruz to San Juan it is unequalled. And during the dry season at Belize, where they depend upon the rains for drinking-water, it is frequently sent from the port, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, to quench the thirst of the loyal British negroes.

It is the delight of the women; for here all the washing for the town is done, and during the day groups of washerwomen may be seen beneath their little palm-leaf huts, hard at work, merry as larks. And woe betide him who is so rashly courageous as to joke them about their personal appearance as they stand knee-deep in the water, punching with their fists as if settling

some old score with the dirt, according to the rules laid down in that model book, *Fistiana*.

Let him also be cautious about his compliments, for their replies are not always to be whispered to ears polite. They are as ready with their rejoinders as the most renowned Irishman. In the language of Young America, I was badly "sold" on several occasions before I could be satisfied. The only instance I think it appropriate to record is the following:

"Why is it, Paula," I said to a nut-brown señorita one day, "why is it you don't get whiter with such frequent washing?"

"Because I am fast colors—all wool. But you are just common stuff, about sixpence a yard; and are white because you have been bleached out." And she pointed significantly at my long figure and pale face, which was shaded by a *sombrero* as large as a common umbrella.

It would be well to observe here that the native women have a perfect contempt for cheap calicoes, preferring plain white when they can't afford the more expensive flounced robes.

The roads leading from this snuggerly are all delightful. The Royal Road, being the main road to Comayagua, is grand beyond description. Sometimes for miles it is shaded by trees alive with every variety of brilliantly-colored singing-bird.

I can conceive nothing more grand or beautiful than a position on the mountains three or four leagues from Omoa, in one of the many arbor-roads, with the woods in twilight repose; when suddenly the cry of the *arceiros*, spurring on their mules, breaks through Nature's stillness, while their merry call echoes and re-echoes among the hills, until Monsieur Pan, if he is still chasing Mademoiselle Echo, must lose himself among such delicious little nooks that I have often wished I were the heathen god.

Before reaching these hills, the road traverses a thickly-wooded plain, about the centre of which, in the road, stands a gigantic tree. Connected with this tree is a quaint legend. It is stated that Cortéz, while wandering between this port and Puerto Cabello—then called *Natividad*, became separated from his companions, and was unable to rejoin them. For a day or so he strove to reach the shore, guided by the sun. At length he came upon the road, which was then nothing but a trail, and saw this large tree, beneath which was resting an Indian girl, who had been to a neighboring stream with her water-jar. He begged a drink of her, which she gave, and added some *tortillas* of corn. Cortéz having refreshed himself, turned to the girl and said, "*Angel mio*, may this kindness of the Indian girl be ever remembered. May this tree never be passed by the traveler without taking his refreshing draught!"

And to the present day this is very generally observed. Indeed, on one occasion, we were off on a jaunt, and had reached the tree when we discovered that our flasks were empty! "Unfortunate negligence! what is to be done?" was

the general question. Pass without drinking we would not, and to return was a two-mile ride. "Don't pass without drinking her health," I cried, my brain being filled with all sorts of romantic ideas, almost imagining the girl was then seated among the branches commending our enthusiasm. We rode back, filled our flasks from the cool mountain stream, again reached the tree, dismounted, and "drank with all the honors" to the memory of the beautiful Baulbina.



CORTÉZ'S TREE.

The inhabitants of Omoa, like those of most of the tropical towns, are rather indolent, their principal business of the day being the *siesta*.

Nature furnishes the poorer classes with food, and the extras are supplied by the small salaries they receive from the merchants, who constitute the "Upper Ten" of the place. A few of them, I think, have some of the pure Yankee blood in their veins, and they turn it to good account. They have formed themselves into an association of mule-catchers. Their business is conducted principally on the savanna which lies between the town and the castle, covering a surface of two square miles. Their mode of procedure is "sharp." If a strange animal is put on the savanna, which is the stabling and grazing ground for the whole district, they assemble *en masse* and run the poor animal almost to death, catching him occasionally with the lasso merely to inform him of their relative positions. When he has become *sufficiently wild*, the poor beast is freed from this annoyance. This process is repeated frequently, in order that the mules and horses may fear the approach of man; then, when wanted, the owners are obliged to employ these scamps to lasso them. Their prices vary from twelve and a half cents to one dollar, the sum fluctuating according to the wildness of the beast.

To a Northern man another subject of interest is the market-house, since it appeals directly to the palate. It consists of a few poles firmly planted in the ground, roofed with palm-leaves, the sides being open for ventilation. It is, in fact, little better than a large shed. In the morning it is the life of the town, the rendezvous for all the old women—a perfect School for Scandal. If the character of any unfortunate escapes dissection here, he or she is safe for the day at least. The dogs also come in droves, and form a considerable portion of the attendance.

Every native family claims any number, from one to one hundred, of these members, each household being known by its dogs; and one can readily discover who is the best customer by the stray bits that are thrown to the animals. Occasionally there is quite an interesting row between the dogs and the “Zopilotes,” which assemble in considerable numbers. This bird—a species of Turkey Buzzard—performs the duties undertaken by the New York Street Commissioner; but, unlike his Gothamite brother, he does not neglect his work and pocket his salary. He has had the undisputed contract of street-cleaning from time immemorial. It would be well for the tax-ridden New Yorkers to import a lot of these birds. I am ready to give them a first-class certificate for faithfulness and efficiency, and would like a small percentage on the savings they would effect.

The meat at the market is not cut *secundum artem*, but into *chunks* of different dimensions,

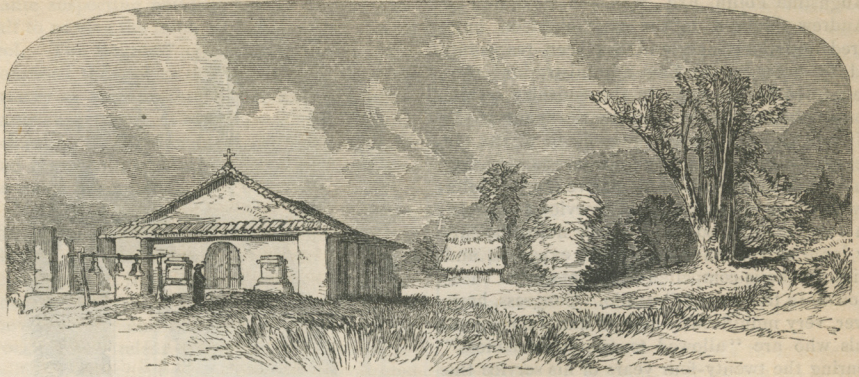
and is sold at prices fixed by government decree. The inferior parts are cut into “strings,” and sold by the yard. This same custom is observed in Nicaragua and New Granada, and I think it is the same in all the Spanish-American countries. If a “chunk” is short weight, a piece of fat or liver is thrown in to make the thing even. Beef-steaks they know nothing of, nor do they appear to possess the capacity of learning how to cut them. The other day I gave the butcher a most scientific lecture on the art of slaughtering cattle as practiced in the North, but the results were so unsatisfactory that I gave up in despair. For “steak” he sent us some “slabs” of meat, evidently cut with much care, as the edges were nicely smoothed, and highly ornamented with the knife. Still the meat was excellent; and as the finest quality cost but *four cents per pound*, I thought we had every reason to be satisfied.

At the market-house congregate many of the beauties of the town, and there is a continual dispute between H—— and myself about the marketing.

He says he knows more about meat, and can make better bargains. I am sure this is not the case, though on one occasion I did purchase two pieces of meat instead of one; and thinking the meat would spoil if kept for the next day, and knowing the butcher would not return to me my money, I was compelled to present the nicest piece to an individual who wore a spotless white dress, flounced from the waist to the ground.



THE MARKET.



CHURCH AT OMOA.

Of course, I had certain reasons for giving this individual the preference; and, moreover, thought it an economical proceeding. Philippa then and there, at the market-house, invited me to her *casa* to dine, declaring her intention of making a "fancy dish" for my entertainment. H—— could not see the force of my reasoning, but I suspect it would have been very clear had he been included in the invitation. I would also observe that this *señorita* has a way of teaching Spanish that enables one to make very rapid advancement.

A short distance above the market-house stands the church, a long, low building, erected regardless of architectural rules. The interior is plastered as high as the eaves, between which and the walls are wide spaces for ventilation. The floor is also plastered over a body of cement, of which it is composed, in lieu of boards. Here the devout Catholics kneel during services, as the place is innocent of chairs, with the exception of one for the "Obispo." Near the main entrance are suspended three bells, which chime on all occasions. They are a nuisance to all except the unfortunates who have endured, as I have, the continual ringing of the bells of the Cathedral at Panama.

The inhabitants are very pious when the Bishop visits the town, which interesting event occurs annually. He passed through soon after I arrived, and a most novel sight it was to me. There are no carriages in the country, and it would not be sufficiently dignified to offer a mule to the Very Reverend gentleman—the Successor of the Apostles—so an office-chair was procured, which, after being suitably ornamented with ribbons, was offered for his acceptance. He mounted the chair, and was carried through the town in this manner, his face and figure being protected from the sun by a canopy carried by four negroes, of such fine proportions that my friend the Doctor said he would give at least fifteen hundred dollars for either of them. However, as they were not for sale, there was no chance for a speculation of this sort. On the way to the church the people kneeled whenever the procession halted, and more than one muddled dress might have been seen after they had been blessed and were permitted to rise. After the Bishop had denounced vice in all its forms, the people were permitted to kiss his hand in token of compliance—the "lords of creation" being honored first. Whether this was intended as a token of their superior dignity, or whether the good prelate kept the most agreeable part of the ceremony for its close, I am unable to say. After mass was performed, he was escorted to the residence of one of the merchants of the town, passing under arches which were thrown across the street through which he had to pass.

Our house being on the line of road, we also erected an arch, from the top of which hung the American flag festooned. The Bishop smiled as he passed under it, with the conviction, no doubt, that "coming events cast their shadows before."

Opposite our house is the residence of the American Consul,



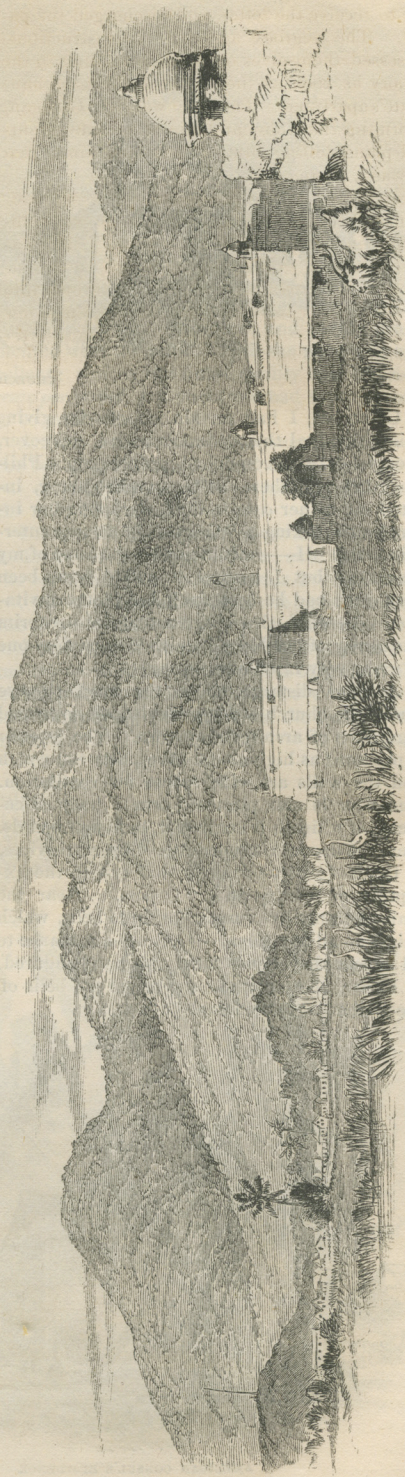
AMERICAN CONSUL'S RESIDENCE.

Augustine Follin, Esq., who was appointed by Andrew Jackson in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-one, and has been reappointed by every succeeding administration; consequently he has been in the consular service longer than any other diplomatic agent of the United States. He is a republican of the old school, sacrificing his private interests whenever they clash with those of his native land. After twenty-four years of gratuitous service, Congress, in July, 1855, voted him a salary not sufficiently large to cover his household expenses, and with this he is compelled to maintain his Vice-Consul in the port of Truxillo. Congress, however, very munificently classed him among consuls who are "allowed to transact business." During the twenty-four years of his service the American Government was never at one cent's expense, every thing being defrayed by Mr. Follin. He is much esteemed by every one here, and many a Central American is rejoiced to call him his "Compadre;" and others, who have been recipients of his kindness, and have become bettered in their condition by his never-failing judgment, love him with a sincerity quite gratifying to his friends. From President Guadiola to the meanest Carib who paddles along the coast, all acknowledge his goodness. Indeed, while I was among the Carib settlements, I have received marked attention by simply mentioning that I was a countryman of his.

He was appointed after the death of Mr. Hosmer, who was killed by a cannon-ball during the insurrection and famous siege of Omoa. This was an important event to the State—the struggle being between the whites and the blacks for supremacy. About the beginning of the year 1831, a notorious character by the name of Gusman was imprisoned in the castle for political offenses. The dungeons being very damp, the poor rascal soon swelled fearfully, and the Commandante, at the supplication of the people, allowed him to walk daily on the savanna. The scamp, having the education of a gentleman, with the tact of a villain, ingratiated himself so completely into the confidence of the unsuspecting officer, that he soon after appointed him his private secretary. Of course Gusman had access to all the private government matter, which enabled him to answer official notes as suited his party purposes.

By this means his plans were soon matured; the negroes and the Guatimalans were assembled in the vicinity of the town. About four days previous to the outbreak, he issued a *proclamo* forbidding the inhabitants to leave their houses after 8 o'clock at night. By this means a number of negroes entered the town without attracting attention. About 11 o'clock in the night, when the first blow was struck, Gusman ordered some of his own soldiers to arrest him, agreeably to the instructions of the *proclamo*.

He went to the residence of the Commandante, and stated he had been arrested by the patrol while bringing an important letter which had just arrived from Comayagua. The Comman-



OMOA AND THE CASTLE, FROM THE BREAK-WORKS.

dante suspecting nothing, hastily dressed himself to receive the letter, and discharged the patrol. The negroes, agreeably to instructions, possessed themselves of the door leading to the armory as soon as they entered the Commandante's apartment. The letter was from Gusman, informing the Commandante of his movements and plans, telling him, at the same time, that he was a prisoner.

He looked at the insurgents for a moment, than rushed for his arms, but saw he was completely in the power of the enemy. He was seized, carried to the fort, compelled to surrender it to his captor, and was finally thrown into the same dungeon from which he had, but a few weeks before, released Gusman. When he recalled the treachery of Gusman, and recollected that his assailants had possession of all the government secrets, he prayed that he might die. He knew his enemy was an able politician and superior military tactician, who had counted well the results of the villainy in which he had embarked his life and hope.

He had been imprisoned once in the never-to-be-forgotten dungeon of the Castle of San Fernando, and it was reasonable to suppose he had made ample provisions to guard against a second incarceration.

And Gusman, to his eternal shame be it spoken, allowed the old man, who had shown him naught but kindness, to rot in the very dungeon from which he was so lately rescued!

Gusman had formed his plans well before his *coup d'état*. He had the support of all the treacherous bands in the State; was promised assistance, and had already received military stores from that enemy to Central American republicanism, Guatemala; and was confident of assistance and support from parties in the other States if he could succeed in his first effort—the capture of the fort. So far he had succeeded. He had disposed of his most formidable enemy, the brave old Commandante, whose very name engendered fears that could not be quieted so long as he stood opposed to them. But he had not counted upon resistance from

the merchants. Guatemala has always had her claws upon Honduras. She is, in fact, an enemy of progress, a sort of Russo-American bear.

The merchants answered her offers of protection as did the Peruvian patriot to the Spanish invaders. They were the owners of all the vessels on the coast, which they soon armed and dispatched as cruisers, and were so fortunate as to overhaul several schooners loaded with provisions, powder, etc., intended for the revolutionists.

This was a serious blow for the negro dynasty, but the castle was moderately well supplied with all the necessaries for a protracted siege.

Government troops soon made their appearance from the interior, but having no heavy guns, could not make a successful attack on the fort. Still, hostilities were commenced, and shot were thrown almost incessantly from the fort for upward of a month without damage; the guns ranging so high that they cleared the town completely, nor did they know how to remedy the evil. After several thousand shot had been lost in this manner, an Englishman, named Vernon, from Belize, was bribed by the insurgents to explain the mystery. He ordered them to cut about a foot from the front part of the gun-carriages; this was soon done, the guns reloaded, and a ball for the first time raked the town! Previous to this every thing was conducted as quietly as if there were no powder within a league of them, nor balls whistling within twenty miles of their housetops.

A party were enjoying the luxuries of a good dinner at the house of our friend Mr. Follin, and were in the midst of some jocular conversation, when the first ball that had been thrown into the town, struck the corner of the house and passed completely through it. It entered the bedroom of Mr. Follin, and after taking most unwarrantable liberties with his wardrobe, introduced itself without ceremony to the company present. It is true they took considerable notice of the stranger, though they refused to offer him the hand of friendship, so he took "French leave" in the direction of the "Old French Soldier," who stood in the corner.

The "Old General" never flinched, and though most of the wall was torn away by the ball, the post to which the bracket was fastened was not touched, and "Napoleon" smiled quietly at the havoc around him.

The old house has been rebuilt, but the statue occupies its former position, nor will it again be disturbed unless Walker, when he enters Omoa, should meet with resistance.

After holding the castle for six months, Gusman was starved into terms; was tried by court-martial; shot, and his head hung



THE MONUMENT ON THE ROAD.



THE GATEWAY ON THE BREAST-WORK.

in chains from the castle wall, where it remained until General Carrera, in 1853, took it down and sent it to Guatemala, together with the head of the "first insurgent," which had been hanging upwards of fifty years. His name has been forgotten, but his body lies buried on the road between the castle and the town. A rough pile of stones was erected over his body, which Time has partially destroyed, though he was less lenient with the iron cage which contained the unfortunate head.

About three months after Gusman had been shot, the negroes organized themselves for a final struggle, determined on this occasion to

spare neither man, woman, or child in whose veins a drop of European blood was flowing. A friendly Carib having discovered their plans, laid them before the merchants, who immediately enrolled a secret corps, one hundred and twenty strong. The signal for the massacre was to fire one of their huts at night; and thinking the whites would, as usual, rush to assist in extinguishing the flames, they were to fall upon them unawares and destroy them. They were then to butcher the women and children in their beds!

The alarm was given; the whites, as was expected, rushed to the fire, but went armed to the teeth, and surrounded the negroes, who were marched in a body to the fort. The next morning they were examined, and nineteen of the ringleaders immediately shot. The others, upon promising obedience to the laws, were allowed to return to their homes.

This effectually crushed the desire of the negroes for power. Since then they have been as quiet and peaceable as can be expected of the African race.

The old Castle of San Fernando, so closely connected with the struggles and history of Omoa, is, including the breast-works, about fifteen hundred feet long. It is built mostly of huge blocks of coral rocks, in



THE BRIDGE.

the old Spanish style of architecture. Its walls are about forty feet high and fifteen feet thick, surmounted by coping and bead-work. On either corner stands a little turret or sentry-box. It was formerly surrounded by a moat of some depth, but, like the elevated road which leads to the town, and was once paved, but little remains of its former greatness.

The breast-works were also strongly built, having two splendid gateways, one on the north, the other on the south side. The northern gate had the date of the building of the fort carved beneath the arms of Spain, but some Vandal has obliterated it.

As it now stands, it is a model of the picturesque. Trees of some size have sprung into existence among the crevices in its masonry, and clambering vines have insinuated themselves in the cracks, and spreading, appear to be possessed with the desire to hide it altogether, finishing the work which an over-zealous official had begun. In a few years, no doubt, it will have crumbled completely; when the remaining vestige of Spain's former greatness on this coast will be the old castle, which, from the material composing its structure, may be as strong two hundred years hence as at the present time.

Along the top are distributed a few old cannon picked up at random, regardless of the suitability of the piece. There are two or three so small that at a distance they sound, when fired, like the report of a Kentucky rifle. Yet there are others that might be very effective did the "soldados" know more of the art of gunnery. Nearly every time a volley is fired in honor of some saint's day, more or less of them are injured. While they were celebrating the 15th of last September, the anniversary of the independence of the Central American States, two men were instantly killed, and others badly wounded, by the premature discharge of a cannon, one of the gunners unclosing the vent while the piece was being loaded.

They were standing in front of the gun to observe the manner of loading, and the effect of the ramrod on the "wad." H——, who was making a sketch while a soldier related the incidents to me, remarked that the effect must have been *very striking*, the more so from the fact of their using ball to increase the noise of the discharge. I remonstrated with him on the propriety of getting off such bad wit on such serious subjects, but 'twas no use. He said he had a reputation among the artists at home of being a "hard joker;" in fact, a bad pun was his card, and he had no idea of changing his address.

The castle was built by Spanish American convicts, superintended by the *Hidalgos* of the colony, and a very respectable amount of money it cost the Spanish king, though the labor was performed by criminals, whose only pay was a sufficient quantity of plantains and rice to keep body and soul together; yet when the commissioners sent in their report, the amount was so enormous that the king thought 'twas built of *gold and silver*. Some idea may be formed of

the expense by a contract, still in existence, for building a bridge over a small ditch in the upper part of the town. The ditch is so insignificant that it is perfectly dry except during the rainy season. It is about thirty feet long, seven feet in width, and four feet in height, and cost the Spanish government \$30,000! What admirable Wall Street bears and bulls they would make did they live at the present time! Schuyler's affair would be considered as a petty matter of no moment.

Omoa was built as an entry port for Spanish commerce, after they had abandoned *Natividad*, which was too large a harbor to protect against the English and French pirates who infested the coast, frequently storming large fortifications, and taking them with apparent ease. This was the case with Old Panama, Realejo, and other ports in Central America. From 1750 until 1848 the town was a place of considerable importance, the supplies for the republics passing first through its streets.

All the goods for the San Miguel falls, which are held in the spring or fall of every year, whither merchants repair for their *efectos*—many journeying hundreds of miles—passed through Omoa.

Then the town was fairly alive with a commercial activity that filled the iron chests of more than one of the fortunate residents. It was always filled with merchants from the interior, who had come down for their supplies; and the merry muleteer, strumming his guitar after the labors of the day, or whirling in the crazy fandango, gave it a lively air, which, for my own sake, I regret it has lost.

Money being plenty, or, as the darkies say here, "too much plenty," the merchants, desirous of more gold, commenced the cuttings of the famous Honduras Mahogany Works, and the banks of the Ullua and Chimalicon rivers supplied the world with this valuable wood; and so extensive were some of the "gangs," that by the non-compliance of an English house to fulfill the contract held by a merchant here, he lost \$300,000. Most of the wood lay at the mouth of the river until it rotted, mingling its precious substance with the waters of the ocean.

A GIGANTIC CENTIPEDE.

NO one can for the first time look upon a centipede without shrinking back with terror, and exclaiming, involuntarily, that it is one of the most repulsive of insects. In its general form it resembles the serpent, but the possession of "innumerable legs" gives it the additional horror of a monstrous creation. Overcoming our first impressions, and examining it attentively, we find that its body is divided into numerous segments of the same length and thickness, each being furnished with a pair of legs, which end in a sharp-pointed claw, backed by three smaller ones, each capable of inflicting a painful inflammatory wound. Its head is ornamented with two short antennae, composed of seven joints, illuminated by two granulated eyes, form-