

CHAPTER XVIII.

Los Placeres.—Another dark Leaf in Salezar's Character.—Women and Watermelons.—Reappearance of Lieutenant Hornsby.—His singular Story of Adventure.—The dashing Horseman and his gentle and generous Wife.—Arrival at Valencia.—Farther Sufferings of the Prisoners.—Kindness of an old Woman.—Death of Ernest.—An American Traveller.—Cruel Murder of McAllister.—Its Effect upon the Prisoners.—Casa Colorada.—A comfortable Camp.—Appearance of the Valley of the Rio Grande.—Uses of the Cotton-wood.—Salezar and the Alcaldes.—The Mexican Button Market.—Straits to which the Prisoners were driven.—A Story of Stump.—Magoffin's Wagons passed.—American Drivers.—Not allowed to hold Converse with them.—Arrival at Joya.—A Fandango.—Salezar Drunk.—Conduct of the American Drivers on the Occasion.—Parrida.—Crossing the Rio Grande.—Arrival at Socorro.—A short Rest allowed.—Character of the Inhabitants.—A Party of Apaches.—Anecdote of the Priest of Socorro.—Head Chief of the Apaches.—His dignified Bearing.—Obsequiousness of Salezar.—Bosque de los Apaches.—Recrossing the Rio Grande.—The Camp of Fray Cristobal.—A Snow-storm at Night.—Appearance of the Prisoners by Daylight.—Colds and Coughs.

AFTER leaving Albuquerque, we continued our march through a succession of cultivated fields and pastures until we reached a small rancho called Los Placeres, and here we were encamped for the night. Nothing was given us to eat, and on complaining to Salezar that we were very hungry, he pointed to the spot where his mules and horses were feeding, and said that the *grazing was excellent!* Because many of the prisoners swallowed the corn given them by the women raw, the fellow called them wolves and hogs.

At this place we were visited by a family of Mexican women of no inconsiderable wealth, who lived at a rancho some little distance from our road. It consisted of a mother and her two daughters, and I will venture the assertion that either of the latter weighed more than

two hundred pounds, and will also declare positively that neither of them was very prepossessing in appearance. They had brought two large watermelons as a present, and while one of the girls bestowed a melon upon one of my companions, her sister made choice of me as the recipient of the other. I gave the girl the customary *mil gracias*, or thousand thanks, as I received the melon; had the pretty one of Albuquerque given me that pumpkin I should have been far better satisfied.

Not a little astonished were we, when, towards evening, our absent comrade, Hornsby, with a chopfallen countenance and a half-worn jacket a world too small for him, was seen approaching, his Mexican friend, the dashing horseman, setting him down near our quarters and then galloping off in the direction of his home. A singular story did the lieutenant tell of his adventure, the substance of which was as follows:

On first mounting behind the Mexican, he supposed that the fellow simply intended carrying him a mile or two on the route—perhaps to Albuquerque, which was then in sight; but to his astonishment the man wheeled his horse suddenly round, and struck off across the fields at a tremendous pace. Hornsby had employment enough in hanging on to his new friend, to avoid being thrown off as the gallant horse leaped the irrigating canals, so that, to use his own words, he had no time to speculate upon the singularity of his adventure, or upon the intentions of the wild horseman who was giving him such a race. A hard ride of three or four miles brought them to a house of neater construction and finish than were possessed by the generality of Mexican dwellings. It was a solitary house, and appeared to be about half a mile from the road he had

walked over but a short time previous. Once at the door, the Mexican threw himself lightly from his animal, and, after assisting Hornsby to dismount, politely asked him to enter his dwelling. There was an air of neatness and comfort within, and the furniture betokened a style of living which formed a singular contrast with the destitution apparent in even the better class of houses upon the road.

His strange host led the way into a room in which the furniture and appointments were absolutely luxurious. Over the fireplace was a large mirror; two or three scriptural paintings, one of them a well-executed portrait of the Virgin, adorned the walls; while upon a sideboard was neatly arranged a set of decanters and tumblers, all of cut glass, and of admirable workmanship. Here the Mexican left him for a moment, but soon returned with a massive silver pitcher filled with cool water.

Unfortunately, Hornsby could speak but little Spanish, and was, consequently, unable to carry on a regular conversation with his host; but when the latter pointed to a tumbler, and then to a decanter of brandy, our lieutenant understood him perfectly, and manifested his knowledge of signs by helping himself to a bountiful allowance. At this juncture the wife of the gay cavalier, a mild-eyed, pretty woman, entered the apartment, and, exchanging a few words with her husband, led the way to a table in another room, which was fairly groaning under the weight of a hot and sumptuous breakfast. Hornsby, now more astonished than ever, and wondering how this adventure was to terminate, took a seat at the table in silence, and ate a heartier meal than he had done for months. Both the husband and wife were assiduous in their attentions, and

pressed dish after dish upon him with a most zealous courtesy.

Breakfast over, the wife brought in a package of cigars, or shuck cigars, and after the husband had lit one of them by means of the flint and steel which every Mexican carries in his pocket, and had politely asked his guest to join him in a smoke, he opened the business which had induced him to *invite* Hornsby to his dwelling. By words, and more particularly by signs, he informed his guest that he had taken a great fancy to his military jacket, and that he must exchange with him. Hornsby responded, with an equal amount of his own vernacular and a corresponding quantity of signs, to the effect that the jacket of his host was much too small for him, and that he was not disposed to trade. The gentle and pretty wife, who had been all the while watching either party, now interfered, her actions plainly denoting that she was anxiously entreating her husband not to entertain their guest thus rudely and uncharitably. Paying no heed to her entreaties, the husband again intimated to Hornsby that he must doff his jacket—he had no money to offer him in exchange, but then he had given him a ride, a drink, and a breakfast, and, as a return for these civilities, only wished to exchange jackets. He stripped off his own, notwithstanding his wife's opposition, and now commenced assisting his guest in taking off the much-desired garment. It was a forced transfer, contrary to the laws of Mexico; but our comrade was driven into the transaction.

The Mexican next brought a coarse, thick, and heavy blanket, which he wished to exchange for the scarlet affair belonging to Hornsby. As there was no such thing as avoiding a trade when his host had determined that it must be, our comrade, with a sorry grace, sub-

mitted to his demands: yet this time he really got the best of the bargain, for the blanket he received was much warmer and of infinitely more service than the one forced from him. The Mexican now pointed to his horse, which was still tied in front of the dwelling, and uttered the well-known *bamanos*.* It was now Hornsby's turn to take a liberty. Heretofore his host had made himself exceedingly free on a very limited acquaintance, as Hornsby dryly expressed it: the latter now bethought him that he would pay off a small portion of the debt in kind. He therefore walked deliberately to the sideboard, poured himself out a stiff glass of brandy, and bowing very respectfully to his host, tossed it off. He then expressed his readiness to depart, and walking out of the house, was soon seated behind his singular host. The wife now made her appearance with the new blanket, in which she had tied a large quantity of dried beef. Watching an opportunity while the eyes of her husband were turned away, she stealthily slipped a quarter of a dollar into the hands of Hornsby—probably her little all. A tear stood in her eye as she murmured "*Adios Señor*," for the kind-hearted creature felt deeply mortified at the inhospitable manner in which her husband had treated a guest. Another moment, and Hornsby was on his way to rejoin his comrades, the Mexican apparently anxious to escape the reproachful looks of his gentle wife; and ere it was yet dark he had discharged his burden within a few yards of our camping-ground. Such was the story told of the gay cavalier, who, by his dashing and fearless riding, had excited our warmest admiration in the morning. Was ever such an ingenious trick

* Come, let us be moving—a word we heard forty times a day, and the import of which we soon understood.

to effect an exchange of clothing? Salezar was probably privy to the whole transaction, else he would have never permitted his brother Mexican to carry off one of the prisoners in such a manner. The self-esteem of the highwayman would not allow him openly to rob our comrade—he thought that the cloak of hospitality which he threw over his act more than covered its rascality. But I must return to my narrative of more important events.

Late on the evening of the 24th of October, and after a march of uncommon length, we reached the little town of Valencia. Here a pint of flour was distributed to each of the prisoners; but many of the men were so tired, faint, and sore, from the long and continued marches, and from cold and want of sleep at night, that they had neither the will nor strength to cook even this scanty ration. On the contrary, they sank immediately upon the cold ground, and vainly endeavoured to smother their pains and sorrows in sleep. Fitzgerald and myself had better quarters, or rather a better bed, that night, than our fellows. We were about lying down, immediately in front of a small house, when an old woman threw us out a couple of sheepskins with the wool still on. With these between us and the cold ground we really passed a comfortable night.

Not so one of our unfortunate companions. On rising in the morning, it was found that a man named Ernest had died during the night—died from hunger, cold, and fatigue, and without even the knowledge of the man sleeping by his side! The long march of the previous day had so weakened the poor Texan that on reaching camp he had sunk to the ground exhausted. He soon fell asleep, and with him it proved to be the sleep which knows no waking! Not a murmur, not a

groan did he utter; but when his companion shook him in the morning, with the intention of arousing him to the fatigues and sufferings of another day, the lamp of his existence had burned out, or rather had been rudely smothered—he was stiff and cold! Salezar immediately ordered one of his men to cut off and preserve the dead man's ears, as a token that he had not escaped, and by the orders of the same brute the body was thrown into a neighbouring ditch. An American with two or three wagons, who was on his way from the United States to either Monterey or Saltillo with machinery, was within two hundred yards of us all the while, and saw the whole transaction. Salezar would not allow us to hold any conversation or communicate with this man; but we afterward learned that he had been an overseer on some plantation near New-Orleans, and that the machinery he had with him was a sugar-mill on a large scale, which he had been employed to set in operation in Mexico. I heard the man's name, but have forgotten it.

Scarcely had the events occurred, of which I have given a brief recital, ere we were ordered to form in line and be counted before resuming the march: even before we could finish the cooking of our scanty supply of meal into thin mush we were compelled to move. Just as we were starting, a man named John McAllister, a native of Tennessee and of excellent family, complained that one of his ankles was badly sprained, and that it was utterly impossible for him to walk. The unfortunate man was naturally lame in the other ankle, and could never walk but with difficulty and with a limp. On starting, he was now allowed to enter a rude Mexican cart, which had been procured by the Alcalde of Valencia for the purpose of transporting some of the

sick and lame prisoners; but before it had proceeded a mile upon the road it either broke down or was found to be too heavily loaded. At all events, McAllister was ordered by Salezar to hobble along as best he might, and to overtake the main body of prisoners, now some quarter of a mile in advance. The wretch had frequently told those who, from inability or weakness, had fallen behind, that he would shoot them rather than have the march delayed; not that there was any necessity for the hot haste with which we were driven, but to gratify his brutal disposition did he make these threats. Although he had struck, and in several cases severely beaten, many of the sick and lame prisoners, we could not believe that he was so utterly destitute of feeling, so brutal, as to murder a man in cold blood whose only fault was that he was crippled and unable to walk. He could easily have procured transportation for all if he had wished, and that he would do so rather than shoot down any of the more unfortunate we felt confident: how much we mistook the man!

On being driven from the cart, McAllister declared his inability to proceed on foot. Salezar drew his sword and peremptorily ordered him to hurry on, and this when he had half a dozen led mules, upon either of which he could have placed the unfortunate man. Again McAllister, pointing to his swollen and inflamed ankle, declared himself unable to walk. Some half a dozen of his comrades were standing around him, with feelings painfully wrought up, waiting the *denouement* of an affair which, from the angry appearance of Salezar, they now feared would be tragical. Once more the bloodthirsty savage, pointing to the main body of prisoners, ordered the cripple to hurry forward and overtake them—*he could not!* “Forward!” said Sale-

zar, now wrought up to a pitch of phrensy. "Forward, or I'll shoot you on the spot!" "Then shoot!" replied McAllister, throwing off his blanket and exposing his manly breast, "and the quicker the better!" Salezar took him at his word, and a single ball sent as brave a man as ever trod the earth to eternity! His ears were then cut off, his shirt and pantaloons stripped from him, and his body thrown by the roadside as food for wolves!

A thrill of horror ran through the crowd of prisoners as the news spread that one of our men had been deliberately shot down in cold blood, and deep but whispered threats of vengeance for this most unnatural murder were heard upon every lip. In our present condition we could do nothing. It would have been an easy matter for us to rise and overpower the guard; but their arms were worthless, and it would have been impossible, unacquainted as we were with the country, to cut our way through to Texas without provisions. And then, as I once before remarked, it was part of Salezar's policy to drive us along and tire us down by marches of almost incredible length, and so to weaken us by scanty food, that escape would be next to impossible. Weak as we were, however, had our guard been well armed with rifles or muskets, and with plenty of ammunition, we never should have been marched to the Paso del Norte; but those who had charge of us were strong in their very weakness. Thus wretchedly we were compelled to journey forward in dreary hope of falling into more humane hands on reaching the State of Chihuahua.

Late in the afternoon of the day on which McAllister was murdered we reached the Casa Colorada, or Red House, a large hacienda and trading establishment be-

day, their encampment being in the skirts of the village close by. Salezar became much intoxicated during the evening, and with the fumes of whiskey in his head grew insolent and overbearing towards the drivers. Fortunately, they came well provided with bowie-knives, thinking they might possibly be insulted; and no sooner had Salezar commenced his insolence than he was driven—I believe *kicked*—from the room, the cowardly wretch not daring even to open his mouth after their weapons were drawn.

By making an early start on the following morning, we were enabled to reach Parrida, a small town immediately on the banks of the Rio Grande, by the middle of the afternoon. Here, in the plaza, we stopped for the night; and here, after an allowance of a pint of meal had been measured out to each man by the alcalde and Salezar, we were permitted to make and eat our poor mush in peace and quietness. At Parrida I was also fortunate in purchasing a pair of heavy and substantial shoes, after walking several days in a pair of soleless moccasins, which let in the gravel at every step upon the numerous blisters that covered my feet. I had not a little difficulty in making change with the *zapatero* of whom I purchased, for the piece of gold I tendered him in payment I was anxious to keep from the eyes of Salezar. The brute knew that I had a small sum of money about me—some few dollars. Had he suspected the large amount in gold and jewelry I had concealed in those ragged and dirty vestments of mine, he would soon have found a pretext for sending me to keep company with the murdered McAllister.

After a hasty breakfast of mush, on the following morning, we were once more upon our journey. A short walk brought us to the banks of the Rio Grande,

here some three or four hundred yards in width. The water was cold and waist deep to our men, yet we were obliged to ford it, and when once safely upon the opposite side, we had entered Mexican territory for the first time. I say for the first time, because Texas claims to the Rio Grande, and, sooner or later, this will be her boundary line.

An hour's brisk march along the river banks brought us to Socorro, the last settlement before reaching El Paso. What the exact distance between the two places is I have now forgotten, but it cannot be far from two hundred miles. As Salezar had to make a demand on the alcalde for corn and meal enough to sustain us across the long and dreary waste yet to travel, we were permitted to remain at Socorro until the following day. That the inhabitants of this frontier town were a pack of thieving, cheating, swindling scoundrels, we ascertained beyond doubt before we had been in the place two hours. I remember, perfectly well, that a small party of us paid for a supper twice at this place, and that, because we would not pay for it a third time, the master of the house became very much incensed.

When we were at Socorro, a party of Indians, belonging to the large and powerful tribe of Apaches, were encamped in the vicinity. They live, for the most part, in a rough and mountainous country, yet, like the Camanches and Pawnees, are ever on horseback, and are daring and skilful riders. With the inhabitants of the States of Chihuahua and Durango they are at continual and open war, murdering and robbing the inhabitants whenever opportunity offers; yet with the people of New Mexico they are at peace, and the plunder they obtain in their incursions into the former states is sold to

the citizens of the latter, who are ever found ready purchasers! A pretty state of things, truly, but so it is. I was told that many of the horses of New Mexico really belonged to persons in the former states, and that the purchasers bought them with powder and lead, knowing that it was to be used against their neighbours and brethren! Armijo and some of his principal officers probably know more about this singular and most unrighteous compact, and of the profits arising from the trade with these Indian banditti, than any other persons in Mexico.

While at Socorro, one of the prisoners, who was a Catholic, obtained permission to visit the priest of the place. The real object of the man was, to obtain something in the way of solid assistance—something to eat upon the road—temporal rather than spiritual aid and consolation. The priest gave him absolution and a small bundle of shuck cigars! I do not mention this circumstance to stigmatize the holy fathers generally of Mexico, for we found a majority of them liberal and enlightened men, and disposed to assist us as far as was in their power.

On the morning of the 29th of October we left Socorro without regret; for although its name signifies succour or assistance, we found none within its inhospitable gates. We had travelled but a short distance before the head or principal chief of the Apaches, with a small retinue of his warriors, was seen rapidly dashing over a hill, having ridden out especially to see *los Americanos*, as they called us, who had surrendered their arms to the New Mexicans. At one time the inhabitants of Chihuahua had employed a number of American adventurers in different expeditions against the Apaches, and in every engagement the former were able to bring

about, the Indians were defeated with no little loss. The rifles of the Americans told with signal advantage against the bows and arrows, lances, and ineffective Spanish carbines of their adversaries, fought they ever so bravely; and now that one of the principal chiefs of the latter had an opportunity of seeing some of the countrymen of their much-dreaded enemies, he did not miss the opportunity.

A more dignified savage in appearance than this chief I have never seen. He was about the middle height, strong, and well built, some sixty-five or seventy years of age, and with hair as white as snow. He was dressed in an old-fashioned blue military coat and blue pantaloons; a huge pair of gold epaulettes graced his shoulders, while his head was covered with a Continental tri-cocked hat, such as was worn by our grandfathers in the days of the Revolution. His countenance was stern, strongly marked, and very expressive, and he was mounted upon a large and powerful gray charger of fine action, and apparently of good blood.

He rode up to the head of the line, in company with Salezar. As we passed in review before him, a ragged, beggared, and emaciated throng, the old man examined us with the eye of an eagle—his thoughts could not be divined. Salezar appeared polite even to obsequiousness in presence of this man, and it was intimated at the time that he stood in much fear lest the old chief might take it into his head to rescue us from his hands, a matter he might easily have accomplished. What would have been our fate had he done so—whether he would have sacrificed us on the spot in revenge for the losses he had sustained at the hands of our countrymen, or taken us to the mountains, is a question I am unable to answer. One thing I do know—had he called for

volunteers to act against any part of Mexico, and promised to arm all that came, he might have got them to the full extent of our number. After the last stragglers had passed him, the old chief turned his horse and rode over the hills in the direction whence he came. His followers were dressed much in the general Indian costume—buckskin shirts, leggins, and the usual quantity of feathers and finery. I also noticed, while in Socorro, that the Apaches have the besetting sin of all the aborigines of America: several of them were seen reeling about upon their horses, so drunk that they could with difficulty keep their seats.

After a walk of unusual length across a bend of the Rio Grande—I say unusual, for it was nearly forty miles—we reached, just at dark, a large grove of cottonwoods close upon the river bank. This grove was called the Bosque de los Apaches, or Wood of the Apaches, and afforded us one of the best camping-grounds on the journey. We recrossed the river at an early hour on the following morning, and another long and tiresome march brought us to Fray Cristobal, the last camping-ground before entering the noted *Dead Man's Journey!* This is a well-known stretch of ninety miles, across a large bend of the river.* To avoid many weary miles, a road has been worn directly through the centre of this bend by the travel of years. It is a level, sterile, and desolate plain—a desert with no vegetation save here and there a few stunted thorns, different species of the cactus of dwarf-like proportions, and clumps of one of the smaller kinds of palm, growing to the height of some six or seven feet, with long, coarse leaves

* The Mexicans call this noted stretch *La Jornada del Muerto*, or The Journey of the Dead Man—our men gave it the name of the Dead Man's Journey, and by that title I designate it.

branching up from the roots, and forming a very mat from the closeness with which they grow together. These clumps were called *bear grass* by our men, and at a little distance they resembled long and slender bundles of coarse straw. Near the centre of the desert is the *Dead Man's Lake*,* which, during the spring and early summer, is filled with water; but when we crossed its bed was perfectly dry.

Immediately on our arrival at the camping-ground of Fray Cristobal, a bleak, sandy point of land formed by a slight curve in the Rio Grande, Salezar ordered that the poorest and most travel-worn of the eighteen oxen given him at San Miguel by Armijo should be killed for the prisoners, taking most especial care, however, that all the better portions—everything really fit to eat—should be reserved for himself and his friends. Poor and tough as was this meat, our men swallowed it with an avidity absolutely wolfish. The scanty meal over, they rolled themselves in their blankets and once more sought such rest as the cold ground might afford them.

During the earlier part of the evening the wind was biting and chilly, but at midnight the weather moderated, and then commenced a violent fall of snow. I drew my blanket entirely over my head, thought of home and its comforts, and while thinking of them fell asleep; for the snow, as it lodged upon my scanty covering, imparted a warmth to which I had long been stranger.

When morning light came I raised my head and surveyed the scene. Far as the eye could reach the face of nature was clothed in white, the snow having fallen to the depth of five or six inches. My companions were lying thick around me, their heads and all con-

* Called by the Mexicans, *Laguna del Muerto*, or *Lake of the Dead Man*.

cealed, and more resembled logs imbedded in snow than anything else to which I can compare them. No one would have supposed that animated beings were under those little mounds were it not that from many of them a hollow, hacking, and half-suppressed cough proceeded. The two or three nights we had passed within doors, huddled some thirty or forty in rooms scarcely capacious enough for three or four, had given nearly all extremely bad colds—colds they were unable either to guard against or cure.

END OF VOL. I.

Good book.

Kindly Narrative

George (William) Marshall

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