

dained it, rode in advance this day, and although the rear-guard beat and mercilessly abused some of the more unfortunate stragglers, they did not go so far as to take their lives. One brute in particular, our more lame and unfortunate companions can never forget. His name, if I ever knew it, has now slipped from my memory, but to recall him to the recollections of all who made the gloomy journey from San Miguel to the Pass, I have only to refer to the fellow who was continually annoying us by his harsh and most discordant efforts at singing. As a general thing, the lower classes of Mexico have voices of rare sweetness and touching melody, and often, while at San Miguel, did we listen to the lays of a party of soldiers with pleasure, as, with tones harmoniously blending, they sang a rude but cheerful catch in praise of Santa Anna; but the notes of this scoundrel were of the most grating nature. Continually was he trotting his mule up and down the line, uttering sounds which were almost demoniacal, and, as though he thought it a fit accompaniment, he sought every occasion to insult, ride over, and strike the sick and the lame, the halt and the weary. Not without shuddering did we hear the horrible tones of this fellow's voice, as he would approach us; and I cannot doubt that this simple mention will bring the grating sounds again ringing in the ears of those who heard him, and who may happen to read this chapter.

Some of the poor prisoners parted with their shoes and shirts, and in many cases even with their blankets, in payment for a ride of a few miles—the unfeeling owners of the animals ever ready to take advantage of such as were unable to walk. In some few instances men were found among the Mexicans who had humanity enough to take up some unfortunate Texan and

carry him a few miles; but those instances were extremely rare.

It was pitchy dark when we reached our halting-place this night, a grove of cotton-woods within thirty miles of El Paso del Norte, and so tired were the men that a majority of them sank supperless upon the ground, too weak to cook the scanty ration of meal which was distributed among them.

We had been but a few moments in this camp before Van Ness, with whom Salezar intrusted many of his secrets, informed Falconer and myself that the miscreant intended to search us all the next day: he suspected, from many little circumstances, that there was still no inconsiderable sum of money among the wretched prisoners, and if his suspicions were true, he determined to gain possession of it.

Knowing, full well, that his search would extend to every portion of our tattered vestments, making it impossible to hide our valuables about our persons, we now tasked our wits to devise some scheme wherewith to cheat Salezar of his anticipated plunder. Various plans were revolved in our minds, but dismissed as not feasible, until finally I bethought me of one which promised success even though the search should prove ever so rigorous. It was to make a small batch of cakes with a quantity of meal we had in a bag, the cakes to be seasoned with our doubloons and such other gold pieces as we had in our possession. This plan was adopted at once, and in an hour, one kneading the dough and forming the cakes, while the other watched the sentinel on duty to see that he did not discover our trick, we had our money all carefully baked with the exception of a few dollars. The latter we carried openly in our pockets to avoid suspicion, and for its loss we cared

but little so that the main amount was saved. My gold watch and chain I gave to Van Ness, who carefully folded them in his cravat and tied them about his neck. As the prisoners had frequently made their meal into cakes of similar size and appearance, we had full confidence of outwitting the avaricious scoundrel should he make his threatened search.

On resuming our march the next morning, Salezar left the oxen which had been furnished for our sustenance on the road, and of which sixteen were still left, behind him: with the oxen he also left some thirty horses and mules, animals then in possession of his guard, but which, it was afterward ascertained, had been either stolen from the inhabitants of El Paso by their present owners themselves, or purchased from the Apaches with the full knowledge that they had been stolen. This bit of rascality arranged satisfactorily by Salezar, and a small guard being left behind to herd the animals out of sight of the main road, we were again on the move.* About sunset we arrived at an encampment directly in the mouth of the gorge through which the Rio Grande has forced a passage—the well-known gap in the mountains called by the Mexicans El Paso del Norte, or the Pass of the North, and within eight miles of the large town of El Paso.

* The pack mule which Salezar took from me, at the time of our arrest, he frequently rode upon the journey between San Miguel and El Paso. She was a strong, powerful animal, but an extremely hard one to ride, having, in addition to a trick of throwing people over her head, a jolting and most uneasy and unsteady trot. To show the cool effrontery of Dimasio, he complained, on several occasions, of the gait of the animal, and said that he was disappointed in her! It is generally considered indelicate to "look a gift horse in the mouth," or allude to any little faults he may possess; I do not see why the same rule should not apply to a stolen mule. That she might take the whim to throw Salezar over her head, as had frequently been her wont when her riders were Americans, was a result I am frank enough to say I hoped for; but I could never learn that she indulged in any of her old tricks while in the hands of her new master.

I have said that the sun was about setting when we arrived at our camping-ground: that luminary lacked some half hour yet of his going down, and never have I seen him sink below the western horizon with such a glow of splendour and magnificence around him as on that occasion. Immediately in front of us, running nearly north and south, rose a chain of frowning mountains, through which, although at the time we could not tell how or where, the Rio Grande has forced its way. The table-land on which we stood reached far as the eye could see to the west. Those who have watched the sun in his setting, may have fancied that on approaching near his apparent resting-place he drops, as it were, several feet at a time, then lingers stationary for a moment, then drops towards his nightly retreat again, as if hurrying to finish his day's work and reach his evening couch of rest. So it was on this occasion, and from some peculiarity in the atmosphere the broad face of the god of day appeared of deeper yet more subdued red, and of four times its ordinary size. The evening air was of a most wooing temperature—mild and bland. The eastern sky received a reflection of softened yet golden lustre, while the mountain sides were clothed with a gorgeous but mellow atmosphere, and the shadows sent among the frowning clefts by the last rays of the setting sun were softened and suffused by the universal glow. While contemplating the lovely scene, and lost to all around me in admiration of its rare and almost holy beauty, I was suddenly aroused by the report that a poor fellow named Gates was dying in one of the wagons. He had taken a severe cold the night we were all penned in the two small rooms, and inflammation of the lungs had ensued; and now, without medicine, without the kind offices of relations, without the

thousand charities and home-comforts that are not to be found in such a wo-worn band as ours, he was dying, and among those who would deny him even the last sad rites of sepulture!

On looking towards the wagon in which the unfortunate man was lying, it was evident he had but a few moments to live: there was a glassy wildness in his eye, a slight rattle and convulsive throes about his neck, which too plainly denoted that his sufferings were soon to terminate. At such a time as this it would hardly seem credible that one could be found, clothed in the outward semblance of humanity, fiendish enough to inflict farther pain and anguish upon his fellow-being: yet such was the fact, and a case of more heartless cruelty up to this time probably stands not on record.

Gates retained his senses, and had just asked one of his comrades, in weak and broken accents, for a cup of water. He had scarcely swallowed it ere a young Mexican, who went by the name of Ramon, took up an empty musket standing by the wagon, and after wantonly pointing it directly in the face of the dying man, snapped it! The latter, unconscious whether the musket was loaded or not, raised his hands convulsively to his face and shrunk instinctively back. The wretch, apparently enjoying the torture he was thus inflicting, again pointed and snapped the gun. This was too much for one who was already wrestling with death. He gave one shudder, his limbs relaxed, and all was over! He was instantly dragged from the wagon by our merciless guard, his ears were cut off by order of Salezar, and the body was thrown by the roadside

"a stiffen'd corse,
Stretch'd out and bleaching in the northern blast!"

On the morning succeeding this revolting act of

cruelty, which was the 5th of November, we started upon our last march under the detestable Salezar. Two or three miles above El Paso, and immediately on the eastern base of the ridge of mountains, we were obliged to ford the Rio Grande at a fall. The river was waist, and in some places even chin deep, the bottom uneven and rocky, while the cold current of water ran with such force that we were obliged to hold each other by the hand in strings to prevent being washed down the stream and drowned. Chilled completely through, and with feet cut and bruised by the sharp and jagged rocks, we were finally fortunate in making the passage, the rear-guard upon their mules and horses whipping and swearing at the lame and weak stragglers of our party who scarcely had strength to buffet with the swift-running stream.

Once safely across, we were ordered to form in sections of four, while the guard paraded in regular order on either side. The last command of Salezar, before galloping forward to give notice of our arrival, was to shoot the Texans who should leave the position in the ranks assigned them! In this order, and with this last threat hanging over us, we were marched into the beautiful and romantic town or city of El Paso.

Our feelings, on entering this town, it is almost impossible to describe. On the route from San Miguel we had been regaled, by our guard, with innumerable tales of the ill-treatment we might expect on reaching the Pass, and also with speculations as to our ultimate fate. Some said that we should be marched by the nearest road to Matamoros, and thence shipped to the United States or Texas; others, again, gave it as their decided opinion that we should be shot, so soon as orders could be received from Santa Anna. As to the two latter opin-

ions, we gave no credit to either of them; as to our being treated worse by the inhabitants of the lower country than we had been by the New Mexicans, that we knew could not be, as Salezar had taxed his ingenuity to the utmost in devising means to harass and torture us. Still, our feelings were sensitively alive as the time rapidly approached when we were to be placed under new masters, and our minds unusually active in speculations upon our future lot.

As we turned the corner of a street leading into the principal plaza, we saw one of our companions, who had left San Miguel the morning before us, standing upon a distant housetop. Another turn, and Doctor Whittaker, with two or three Texan officers, was seen standing by a small bridge thrown across one of the irrigating canals which traverse this pleasant town in every direction. They appeared to have the liberty of parole, if nothing more, were clean shaved and neatly enough dressed, and bore every appearance of having fallen into kinder hands, and to have received infinitely better treatment than had fallen to our lot.

In a few minutes more, in presence of the alcalde and other officers, we were marched into a large yard, having rooms on every side, and then, after being counted, consigned to the keeping of a new guard. Shrewd and close observers of physiognomy had we all become by this time—we looked at the countenances of those who were now over us, and a single glance sufficed to assure us that we might expect better treatment; nor were we disappointed.

In two hours after our arrival, and without the most remote expectation of any such good fortune, the Texan prisoners found themselves, in squads of six or eight, billeted about at the different houses of the inhabitants,

and feasting upon the best the place afforded. Well-cooked meats, eggs, the finest bread, and in many cases even the wines of the place were served out to them, and in an abundance to which for months they had been strangers. From the different doors and windows they could see small knots of their late guard passing and re-passing; and with the recollection of their recent brutal treatment fresh within them, they did, in the fulness of their hearts, heap upon their former insolent and overbearing, but now craven and powerless enemies, all the Spanish terms of indignity and reproach they had learned while in their company, mixed with good hearty curses in the vernacular whenever they ran out of foreign objurgations.

In the mean time, Falconer, Van Ness, and myself were taken to the house of the commandant of this military department, Don J. M. Elias Gonzalez, or, as he was generally termed, General Elias, a well-bred, liberal, and gentlemanly officer. No sooner had he been made acquainted with the conduct of Salezar, than he expressed great indignation; and as our men had suffered so much from want of food and excessive fatigue, he at once said they should be allowed three days' rest to recruit and strengthen.

The family of General Elias consisted of his *prima*, or first cousin, a portly, handsome, and good-hearted lady, some forty years of age, who attended to his household affairs, and a well-educated young nephew, on a visit from Sonora. His name was Don Jesus,* and to him we were all under obligations for repeated acts of kindness and attention. Captain Francisco Ochoa, said to have been an aid-de-camp of the Em-

* No relation to our old acquaintance of New Mexican memory, but a different personage altogether.

peror Iturbide, was also a guest at the house—a good-humoured, laughing, and dashing officer of some forty years of age, although at first view he seemed much younger. Ochoa was frank and soldierlike in his bearing, expressed the greatest abhorrence of Salezar and his herd of *ladrones* and *picaros** as he called them, and in travelling with us some five or six hundred miles, ever proved himself a friend and a gentleman.

About five o'clock in the afternoon a servant brought us in cakes and chocolate, the latter of the richest quality and most delicious flavour. At eight o'clock General McLeod and Mr. Navarro, who took all their meals with our generous host, arrived, when we immediately sat down to a well-arranged and sumptuous supper. It was the first table we had seen for five months—so with the chairs. What a contrast! On that very morning, and within twenty yards of the spot where the body of the unfortunate Gates was lying, Falconer, Van Ness, and myself had hastily swallowed a meal of badly-made mush, upon the ground, our minds full of misgivings as to the treatment we might receive on getting out of the hands of Salezar—now we were seated at a table covered with luxuries, the guests of a gentleman attentive to our every want. Even the fact that we were still prisoners was forgotten.

As the mind of the reader wanders back through the gloomy vista of the preceding five months, it will find but few bright spots for the memory to linger upon. During that time we had been living “out of doors”—the ground, whether wet or dry, warm or cold, our only bed—the sky, whether blue or black, clear or cloudy, our only canopy. For weeks, I might almost say

* Loafers, scoundrels, thieves—the terms mean anything and everything opprobrious.

months, previous to our capture, we had lived upon an allowance which barely saved us from starvation, and even this small pittance of food was more fitting the mouths of prairie wolves than human beings. After our capture, in addition to the cruel insults and indignities that were heaped upon us, we were fed and driven along our involuntary pilgrimage under treatment that would have claimed the intervention of civil laws if inflicted upon droves of cattle, sheep, or hogs in a civilized land. Let the reader recollect these facts, and he will not marvel that our hearts were now rejoiced within us, prisoners though we were, on once more finding ourselves in the midst of plenty and treated as men. But our supper is getting cold, and as it is the first we have had for nearly half a year, we must commence upon it.

It consisted of a variety of dishes, all well cooked, and, but that some of them may have been seasoned rather too highly with red pepper, garlic, or onions for Anglo-Saxon tastes, all extremely palatable. And here were veritable chairs, knives and forks, plates, tumblers, and the many appurtenances of a supper-table—we had not entirely forgotten their uses, as the cook of our kind host could testify. The *vino del pais*, or wine of the country, too, was placed before us, of a quality far from inferior, and in the greatest profusion. The inhabitants of El Paso, or many of them, drink it from tumblers of the largest size, and in quantities which would startle a Frenchman over his claret, or a New-England farmer over his cider—I have reference, in speaking of the latter, to times before the establishment of temperance societies and root beer associations. Supper over, some two hours were spent in smoking and conversation, when we retired to bed.

Here was another comfort which for months we had not enjoyed—had almost forgotten—and for a long time we could not close our eyes in sleep, so novel was the luxury. We were under a roof. Our beds were of the very best—sheets as white as the driven snow, and pillow-cases neatly fringed and of the finest linen. We kicked, tossed, and rolled about for hours; and our various antics, some of them ludicrous enough, might be likened to the feats of tumblers in a ring. Sleep finally overtook us, nor was it broken until a little before sunrise, when a neat and pretty girl brought us in cakes and chocolate. Without his chocolate in the morning, the Mexican gentleman would be miserable all day.

After partaking of our chocolate, we arose refreshed and invigorated, and with feelings very different from those of the previous morning. At nine o'clock we had breakfast, consisting of some five or six courses, with wine, but no coffee. At two dinner was served, late in the afternoon we again had chocolate and cakes, and at eight o'clock supper. I have been thus particular in giving the number and order of our meals to show the difference between the customs there and in this country.

Although meats may be seen in profusion, at both breakfast and supper, on the table of the Mexican gentleman in the northern and middle departments of the Republic, the principal and most substantial meal, as with us, is the dinner. The meal generally commences with mutton soup or broth—then comes a dish of boiled mutton, frequently followed by a stew of the same meat. A favourite dish with the Mexicans in the State of Chihuahua is made of the blood of sheep, fried and seasoned, which is very palatable. Chickens and eggs, cooked in different ways, but the former never roasted as

with us, make their appearance during the meal. A standing article is the *chile guisado*, mention of which I have already made in a former chapter. *Frijoles*,* a species of dark beans of large size, stewed or fried in mutton fat and not too highly seasoned, wind up the substantial part of a dinner, breakfast, or supper, and seldom is this favourite and national dish omitted. In fact, *frijoles*, especially to the lower order of Mexicans, are what *potatoes* are to the Irish—they can live very well so long as they have them in abundance, and are lost without them. A failure of the bean crop in Mexico would be looked upon as a national calamity.

Among the higher order of Mexicans the dinner finishes with fruits, *dulces* or sweetmeats, and the never-failing paper or shuck cigar. In the southern department these cigars are manufactured of tobacco, neatly rolled in paper, put up in bunches, and then sold at a low price; but in the States of Chihuahua, Sonora, and New Mexico, and more particularly the latter, every man is provided with a small pouch of *punche*, a species of plant somewhat resembling tobacco, for the cultivation of the latter is specially prohibited except in some of the southern departments. In another pouch or case he carries a parcel of corn husks, and a flint and steel. With these materials he makes his *cigarrito*, strikes a fire, and smokes almost incessantly. Women and men are alike addicted to the practice, and the prettiest *señora* in the land can be seen at almost any time with a *cigarrito* in her mouth, the smoke puffing from her nose in two straight volumes, somewhat resembling the escape pipes of a double-engine steamer on a small scale. It may be thought singular, however, that the

* Pronounced *freeholeys* by the Mexicans. From the similarity in the pronunciation, our men always called them *freeholders*.

children of either sex are not addicted to smoking. It appears to be a habit taken up after the person has attained full growth, and when once contracted is never abandoned.

On the afternoon after our arrival at El Paso, and while we were drinking wine and partaking of a truly sumptuous dinner at the table of the commandante, the notorious Salezar entered the room, the object of his visit being to render an account of his stewardship in relation to the Texan prisoners. He appeared struck with mute astonishment, as his eye glanced in the direction of our table, at seeing those whom he had so recently treated like brutes now in such excellent quarters and associating with an officer infinitely above him; and there was an air of sneaking and cowardly inquietude about the monster as he opened his business with General Elias.

He began by saying that Governor Armijo had intrusted him with the charge of guarding a certain number of men from San Miguel to El Paso; that he had turned over the whole number with the exception of five, who had unfortunately died upon the road; and to prove that they had really died, and had not escaped, he *had brought their ears*, at the same time throwing upon the table five pairs of them which he had strung upon a strip of buckskin! General Elias at once told him that he had murdered, basely murdered, three of these men. The miscreant denied this charge, at the same time turning a black look in the direction where we were quietly smoking. He said that he was a brave man, and that when he was in the advance his master, Armijo, could always sleep in quiet and security. The commandante coolly told him that the business before them had nothing to do with his personal prowess and

bravery, or with the estimation in which Armijo held him; they were talking of three men whom he had cruelly put to death for no crime. Salezar, finding that his superior officer had abundant proof of the facts, made no farther denial; but he turned upon Van Ness a look of bitter hatred, for he had treated him with so much kindness and consideration upon the road that he supposed in him, at least, he would find a defender. Van Ness had very properly informed General Elias of every circumstance that had occurred upon the road, and the cunning Salezar, now seeing that he had no one to defend him, made no farther denials.

The commandante next told Salezar that there were sixteen head of cattle, honestly belonging to the Texan prisoners, which had been left some thirty or forty miles back upon the road. This was a thunderbolt to the scoundrel, for he had fondly hoped to secure these cattle as his own plunder. With a twitch of the shoulders he began to stammer forth some excuse or denial; but he was cut short by General Elias, who all the while preserved his temper, with the remark that there were also a number of horses and mules left at the same camp, which he had strong reasons to believe were the property of some of the citizens of El Paso. At all events they must be immediately sent for—cattle, horses, and all—and until they were all brought in, and their brands and marks examined, Captain Dimasio Salezar must consider himself under arrest. The scoundrel gave us another scowl of mingled hatred and revenge at the conclusion of this interview, and then skulked from the room, an abject, pitiful wretch.