

CHAPTER IV.

Arrival at Guajuaquilla.—An Invitation.—Inhospitable Hospitality.—A little Mexican Lawyer.—His Self-importance.—A disagreeable Night.—Our Companions fare better.—Again on the Road.—Rejoicing at Guajuaquilla.—Tricks of a Wag.—Amusing Anecdote.—Montezuma's Brother.—Arrival at El Rio Florido.—General Pike.—The Hacienda of La Noria.—Its former Wealth and present Condition.—Inroads of the Apaches and Camanches.—A young Irishman.—Visited by pretty Girls.—A well-informed Mexican Lady.—Musical Soirée and Dancing.—Change of Scene.—Arrival at Cerro Gordo, in the State of Durango.—Our new Commander, Colonel Velasco, pointed out to us.—His sinister Appearance.—Visited by a French Woman.—A Fandango and Cock-fight.—Departure from Cerro Gordo.—A general Turn-out of the Inhabitants.—Suspicious in relation to Ochoa's Integrity.—Our new Guard of Dragoons.—Their Treatment of the Prisoners.—Honourable Conduct of Ochoa.—A roadside Camp.—Colonel Velasco's Character begins to develop itself.—Excellent Provisions provided.—Large Drovers of Horses passed.—An immense Hacienda.—Former Wealth of the Proprietress.—Condition of the Peons, or Working Classes of Mexico.—Farther Insight into the Character of Velasco.—The Texan Officers allowed their Parole.

THE night of the 6th of December was passed, agreeably enough, by a majority of the prisoners, at the town of Guajuaquilla, a place of no inconsiderable note in this section of Mexico—but a small party of us were made extremely unhappy by the misnamed hospitality of a whipper-snapper of a lawyer. When within five miles of Guajuaquilla, this little fellow rode up from a rancho near the roadside, and after selecting General McLeod, Messrs. Navarro, Falconer, Van Ness, and myself as his victims, invited us, with much importance, to his dwelling close by, at the same time promising the little major who had charge of us that he would be responsible for our appearance on the following morning. There was something haughty and repulsive in the aspect of the man, and I should have preferred taking the

chances of procuring a good dinner and lodging in Guajuaquilla; but we were all obliged to accept his proffered hospitality, and I have little doubt the fellow thought he was doing us great honour and conferring a high favour by inviting us to his house. Be this as it may, he made us very uncomfortable.

At home, we found him a vain, pompous, talkative braggadocio, with a very limited education, and not the least real knowledge of the world. He did not think so himself, of course; but he thoroughly convinced us of the fact by his desperate endeavours to elevate himself in our opinions. He recounted the different offices he had held—said that at one particular time he was a colonel of the militia, an alcalde, a lawyer, and a judge—and that he had put seven men in the stocks in one single day, for daring to disobey his orders. As he thus ran on, he raised himself on tiptoe at every fresh demonstration of his own importance and power, and being naturally but about four feet and a half in height, seemed endeavouring to elevate himself to the ordinary standard of humanity. He gave us a miserable dinner, worse chocolate in the evening, a shuck bed to sleep upon, a breakfast in the morning which would have been spurned by a dyspeptic Grahamite, and then had the cool impudence to ask us if we had ever been treated so well before, and hoped that we might recollect him. I can assure him that he has not been forgotten. In almost every instance where we were invited to the houses of the Mexicans of the higher order, we found them gentlemanly in their deportment and extremely good livers—the little coxcomb I have just mentioned was a signal exception.

After our scanty breakfast he accompanied us into the town, where we found that our companions had

passed a very agreeable night. They had been extremely well lodged, and had been invited to a fandango attended by all the beauty of the town. This incensed us more than ever against our ignorant, conceited, and mean-spirited host, but there was no help for it.

Shortly after the arrival of our little party in Guajuquilla, the march was resumed. The journey that day was short, as we had reached, before noon, a noted stopping-place, where there was a spring in a grove of cotton-wood trees. After sundown it was evident enough that there was a great rejoicing in the town, where our main body had slept the night before. Rockets were seen shooting in the air, the report of muskets was heard, and everything denoted that the appearance of such a body of Texan prisoners was enough to arouse the patriotism of the inhabitants, and induce them to celebrate the unusual occurrence by fireworks and other demonstrations. The hand, too, of the little lawyer who had annoyed us the night before, was plainly to be seen in this outpouring of the public feeling; and I have little doubt he was very officious among squibs, India crackers, Chinese-wheels, blue fires, and sky-rockets. While I was enjoying what he called his hospitality he gave me his name. I did not think, at the time, that I should ever forget it; but it has entirely escaped my memory. I hope he will excuse me for not giving it in full, more particularly when he is informed that it is far from being an intentional slight on my part.

In a party so large as ours, numbering some hundred and seventy, and composed of persons from almost every Anglo-Saxon settlement under the sun, as a matter of course there were many originals—fellows up to all sorts of mad pranks, and ever ready to play off their tricks when opportunities occurred. Conspicuous among

them was Captain H., a man with great powers of imitation, an inexhaustible fund of humour, and a dry manner of telling stories and playing off his practical jokes. Poor fellow! he is now dead; but the memory of his queer conceits still lives.

Among us, at the time, was a good-natured, easy, quiet sort of personage from the Western country, whom I shall call D. While nearly every one of the prisoners had picked up Spanish enough to "get along," as the saying is, D. never could learn the name even of the commonest utensil or article of food, and the same may be also said of Captain H. The latter, however, in mere fun, had induced D. to believe that he spoke the purest Castilian, and was always ready to interpret everything for him at a moment's notice. As a consequence, the most ludicrous scenes were of almost daily occurrence, and the translations of Captain H., while interpreting for his friend, would often drive from our minds the thousand melancholy reflections our forlorn situation could not but suggest. One or two little circumstances I will relate, which created great mirth at the time.

We were encamped in the plaza of a small town, the name of which I have forgotten, when a poor woman approached D. with two loaves of bread to sell. She had a reboso on her head, one end of which, drawn over her left shoulder, fell down in front. An infant, not more than three months old, was plainly seen resting upon her left arm, while the hand which held the bread was entirely concealed under the reboso. Addressing D. in Spanish, she asked him if he wished to purchase her bread.

"What does she want?" said D., turning to Captain H.

The latter knew just as little of the wishes of the woman as the former; but his ready wit at once saw that fun could be extracted from the circumstance. Mixing up, therefore, some half dozen unintelligible words—a speech of which D. knew as little as himself, and of which the poor woman was as ignorant as either—he mumbled them over as though addressing the Mexican in her own language. With an inquiring look she asked H. what he said, while he, without the least knowledge as to the meaning of her question, turned to D. with,

“She wishes to know if you don’t want to buy that child.”

“The unfeeling brute!” ejaculated D., evidently believing every word of his waggish friend. “Tell her ‘No.’ Tell her I’ve got a wife and three children already, and the Lord only knows how they are provided for. What upon earth does she think I want with her child?”

I turned away from the spot to conceal my laughter, as did several who were present, and who understood the joke. The perfect seriousness with which the wag carried the whole affair through completely deceived D., and I doubt not he really and honestly thought the woman wanted him to purchase her child.

But the anecdote to which I allude occurred on the morning when we left our encampment under the cotton-wood trees, the 8th of December. We had travelled but a few miles before we reached a large monument by the roadside, erected, a year or two previous, to the memory of some colonel in the Mexican service. On the side fronting the road was a long inscription in Spanish, detailing the services the occupant of the tomb had rendered in the Mexican Revolution, his exploits in

ridding the country of the Spaniards, and his many heroic, patriotic, and virtuous deeds. While two or three of us were looking at the monument, the two actors in the scene above mentioned came up to examine it. Had the inscription been in Chaldaic, it would have been equally intelligible to either of them; but D. had the most implicit reliance in H. as a translator of Spanish.

“What is all that reading about, captain?” said D.

“On the monument there?” queried H., evidently studying some kind of speech.

“Yes, on the monument there.”

“You want me to translate it, D., do you?”

“I do.”

“Well, it amounts to this—Here lies the body of Montezuma’s brother.”

“His *what*?” said D., opening his eyes.

“His brother,” coolly replied the imperturbable H., “who came to an untimely end, on the 15th of November, 1598, by the bite of a rattlesnake. This monument is erected as a testimonial of the high esteem in which he was held by *his aunt*.”

“His *aunt*?” inquired D., with emphasis.

“By—his—aunt!” answered the wag, slowly and deliberately uttering each word as though there could be no mistake about it.

This was too much, and I was obliged to put my horse into a brisk canter in order to reach a place where I could have my laugh out, without raising suspicions in the mind of D. that the whole thing was “got up” expressly for his benefit. Not a smile could be detected on the countenance of H. while he was giving his extremely free translation, and to judge from outward indications his friend swallowed every word of it.

That night we reached a small hacienda on the Rio

Florida, the place where General Pike left the main road when he was conducted through the interior of Mexico. From this point he was escorted out of the country by a detachment of Spanish troops, taking Saltillo, San Antonio de Bexar, and Nacogdoches in their route.

On the next afternoon we arrived at the old and well-known hacienda of La Noria,* where is a deep and never-failing well. From this well the immense herds of sheep, cattle, and horses raised on the estate are supplied, the water being drawn by two mules attached to an apparatus for the purpose. The hacienda of La Noria was formerly very wealthy, yielding a heavy revenue to its proprietor; but of late years the Comanche and Apache Indians have stolen large numbers of horses, cattle, and sheep, as well as grain, from the neighbourhood, and but a week or two previous to our arrival they had made a descent in the vicinity, killed three or four of the *peons*, or labourers, and carried off a large quantity of plunder. All over the States of Chihuahua and Durango the inhabitants live in continual dread of these savages.

At La Noria we met an Irishman, a lad of some eighteen or twenty years of age, who lived at a small village one or two leagues from the road. Two or three young ladies were also on a visit to the hacienda, having come expressly to see us. Their father was an Irishman who had settled early in the country, but their mother was of Mexican birth, and they could speak no other language than hers. All of them were pretty—one was extremely beautiful. She had the dark, expressive eyes, the long, silken lashes, and the rich bru-

* Signifying, in English, *the water-wheel*, or wheel by which water is drawn from a well.

nette complexion of her mother, while from her father her cheek derived that rosy, healthy tint, which seemed to gain something richer than its native charm when seen struggling, like sunlight, through the soft and beautiful brown of a Castilian skin. We at first supposed they could all speak English, but afterward ascertained that such was not the case. After spending an hour or two at the hacienda they went away, accompanied by their mother and the young Irishman, for their home at the village.

The lady of the house at La Noria was a well-educated woman, having spent some time at an academy in Durango. She also sang very well, and played upon the guitar admirably. When night came she gave us a fandango, which, before it ended, was turned into a musical *soirée*, and we really passed a very agreeable evening. She gave us several Spanish ballads with much feeling, and sang, in Italian, an aria from one of Bellini's operas, showing herself equally conversant with his music and his language. We had several very tolerable singers among ourselves, and from the song, mirth, and hilarity which prevailed, a spectator could not have supposed that we were prisoners in a strange land, and profoundly ignorant as to the fate that awaited us. So it was all the way through Mexico. One night we were enjoying ourselves with music and the dance—the next we were shivering over a scanty fire in the open air, and sleeping exposed to such inclemency as the ruler of the elements might see fit to bestow.* The very night after the scenes I have described above

* Neither the Mexicans nor Indians, even where wood is abundant, build large fires. It is a common remark with the Indians, that the Americans make such large fires that they cannot approach near enough to warm themselves.

we were encamped upon a cold hillside within a couple of miles of Cerro Gordo, not a sign of human habitation in sight.

It was with feelings not a little excited that we entered the miserable town of Cerro Gordo the next morning. At this place Ochoa was to leave us, and we were to be consigned to a new guard. We were to enter a new state, too, that of Durango, and were ignorant as to the treatment we might receive from the governor. During our journey through the State of Chihuahua, a distance of some five hundred miles, we had been treated comparatively well; whether we were to find a continuance of such usage was a matter of great uncertainty, and hence our uneasiness.

As we were taken through the long street upon which the greater part of the town is built, our new commander, Colonel Velasco, was pointed out to us. At the time, I thought him the most unprepossessing specimen of humanity I had ever met with. He was dressed in a light blue roundabout or short jacket, with a small red cord along the seams and three rows of small silver-plated buttons in front, while his pantaloons were of cloth of the same colour, foxed with green morocco, to prevent his saddle from chafing and wearing them. He wore an enormous pair of whiskers, upon which he had apparently bestowed no attention, and his upper lip was disfigured or ornamented—I leave this point for my reader to decide—with a pair of huge, grizzly, coarse mustaches, which stuck out in almost every direction but the right one. His head was covered with a profusion of long, iron-gray hair, but partially covered by a small, rakish cap, drawn over his eyes as if to conceal any sinister expression they might have. Such is but an imperfect picture of the man

who was to have charge of us, and not a person in our party could look at him without a shudder, or without thinking we had fallen into the hands of a second Salezar.

We were taken entirely through the town and confined in an old deserted building. Here, upon the walls, were the names of Cooke, Brenham, Frank Combs and others, written by themselves a short month previous. During the afternoon we were visited by numbers of the inhabitants, and also by a lively little French woman, who invited several of us to dine at her house. Her husband was dead, having left her a large property, and she evinced the greatest commiseration for our unfortunate condition, as well as a desire to alleviate it as far as lay in her power. At night several of us went to a fandango and cockfight, accompanied by two or three Mexican officers only as a guard. Everywhere we were treated with the greatest civility, and at a late hour we returned to our quarters and took up our hard lodgings upon the cold earth floor. There was something in our treatment, so far, that gave us some hopes we had fallen into humane hands; but whenever the picture of Colonel Velasco, with his mustaches, whiskers, and iron countenance, was called to mind, the hopes of being well used in a great measure vanished.

As some little preparation was necessary, in procuring bread-stuffs and other requisites for our journey, it was not until near the middle of the day on the 12th of December that we took up the line of march. We had been led to suppose that we were to be taken through Durango, the city of pretty women and *alicrans*;* but

* I believe that the city of Durango is somewhat celebrated for the beauty and talent of its women—I know that it is noted for the numbers and venomous qualities of its *alicrans*, or scorpions. Frequently, while travelling