

as Colonel Cooke's party had gone by that route, we were ordered to proceed by a more easterly road. Before our departure, nearly all the officers of our guard who had accompanied us from Chihuahua came to take their leave of us, and bade us a kind farewell. Ochoa was not among the number, and as he owed several small sums to the Texan officers—money which he had borrowed at different places on the road—for the first time suspicions of his integrity were aroused. These suspicions were farther increased when the trumpet sounded an advance, and we were ordered to proceed.

The signal for our departure was also the signal for the entire population to rush to the street through which we were to pass, and as usual we found either side

through the State of Durango, were we regaled with Mexican stories of the swarms of poisonous alicrans which infest the capital. Of course I can say nothing of these insects from personal experience, not having been within thirty miles of the city which they inhabit; but if half the tales told me were true, the inhabitants must be kept in continual fear and much trembling on account of them. To children and to elderly persons the bite or sting of the alicran is said to prove fatal, while to the middle-aged they cause suffering the most intense. A bounty of some three or six cents—I have now forgotten the precise sum—is paid by the authorities for each insect secured, and according to some of the stories told us, no inconsiderable business is carried on in the way of catching and bottling the much-dreaded scorpions. As it may not prove uninteresting to many of my readers, I will quote a short paragraph in relation to these singular insects from the narrative of General Pike: "The scorpions of Durango are one of the most remarkable instances of the physical effects of climate I ever saw recorded. They come out of the walls and crevices in May, and continue in such numbers that the inhabitants never walk in their houses after dark without a light, and always shift or examine the bedclothes and beat the curtains previous to going to bed, after which the curtains are secured under the bed, similar to the precautions we take with our moscheto bars. The bite of these scorpions has been known to prove mortal in two hours. The most extraordinary circumstance is, that by taking them ten leagues from the city of Durango they become perfectly harmless, and lose all their venomous qualities!" Such are the stories told of the much-dreaded alicrans of Durango. Of their size and appearance I could learn little, save that they are an inch or more in length, have many legs, and move with much celerity.

thronged with a crowd of the most motley description—priests, robbers, peons, loafers, soldiers, half-dressed girls, naked children, high and low—all eager to obtain a last sight of *los Tejanos*. In the throng we observed many of the girls we had seen at the fandango the night before, waving their hands and murmuring their "*adios, caballeros*" as we passed. Our new guard was composed of about one hundred men belonging to Colonel Velasco's regiment. They were tolerably well mounted, it being a cavalry regiment, and known by the name of the "Frontier Guard of Durango." Their uniform is a blue woollen coatee or jacket trimmed with red, with velvet trousers of the same colour, and instead of a common cavalry cap they all wear a coarse, wide-brimmed wool hat, with a plate of tin some two inches in width entirely circling the crown. Their arms consisted of a carbine, slung to their saddles on the right and with the breech up; on the left side of the saddle is fixed a lance, to the end of which a strip of red flannel or woollen stuff is attached, which flutters gayly as they ride along; a heavy cavalry sword, which clatters at every movement of their horses, completes their equipment, for although a pair of holsters were attached to the pommels of their saddles, I never could see that they contained pistols. All were excellent horsemen, and at a little distance their appearance was decidedly showy and gallant; but a closer inspection convinces that they must prove ineffective men when hard blows and knocks and heavy service are required of them. They rode on either side of us in regular order, and evinced a degree of discipline far superior to that of the raw militia who had heretofore accompanied us; but they were old soldiers, and we augured very favourably as to our future treatment from their politeness, and the

many little acts of deference which none but the veteran soldier exhibits to those whom chance may throw in his power. Throughout our long and tedious march we were almost invariably well treated by the regular troops, while the young and undisciplined recruits and raw militia were overbearing and insolent in their general deportment.

We had reached the confines of the town, and were about striking out into the open country, when a servant of Captain Ochoa came riding up in haste, and delivered a note and small parcel to Mr. Navarro. The note was written in Spanish, very courteously worded, and the purport of it was that Captain O. could hardly trust his feelings in bidding us farewell in person. He however sent his best wishes for our health and happiness while upon the road, and his hopes that we might be speedily liberated on reaching the city of Mexico. In the same note he stated that, in the parcel which accompanied it, would be found the different sums of money he had borrowed of our officers on the road, with a regret that he had been unable to repay them sooner. Nothing could have been more delicate or more gentlemanly than the tenour of this note. The clouds which had been rising over his fair fame were at once banished, and Captain Ochoa again stood out in the broad, clear light of an honourable man. I know not whether these remarks may ever meet his eye, but if they do, he will see that he has not been forgotten.

There being no settlement within some fifteen leagues of Cerro Gordo, we encamped, the first night, in a little mesquit valley, near a spring of water. Here the true character of Colonel Velasco began to develop itself. He asked the quantity of beef which had been given to each of the prisoners upon the march—apologized for

the quality of that he ordered to be killed on the occasion—said it was the best he could procure at Cerro Gordo, and wound up by assuring us that, so long as we were under his charge, we should have the fattest meat and the best bread that could be obtained on the route, and as much as we wished for. Generally speaking, the character and disposition of a man may be read from his countenance; but in this instance we were all deceived. It may have been, however, that the huge whiskers and mustaches of Colonel Velasco completely hid all the better qualities of his mind as reflected in his face, for, unprepossessing as was his countenance, we ever found him a kind-hearted, gentlemanly officer, and disposed to grant us every indulgence in his power.

On our first day's journey from Cerro Gordo we passed a large number of horses and mules, herded on either side of the road in small droves not exceeding forty or fifty in each gang. The pasturage, as far as the eye could reach, was excellent, with no other trees than an occasional mesquit not much higher than a common thornbush. And here I might mention a fact which may not be generally known to my readers. Those at all conversant with Mexico know that it is far from being a wooded country; but few are aware of the extreme sparsity of trees to be seen while travelling through it, and more especially along the high table-lands. I have seen more trees in one day's travel in the United States than during a journey of three months through Mexico. In fact, every tree met with on the route between Santa Fé and the city of Mexico, with the exception of those which have been planted by the inhabitants, could be set upon twenty square miles in the United States and find a sufficiency of

room to grow. The tops of some of the mountains are partially covered with stunted oaks, cedars, and pines, and from these the poorer classes and Indians make charcoal, which ever finds a ready sale in the larger towns and cities. They have no other use for it than to cook their food, fireplaces being nearly unknown after getting as far south as Zacatecas.

We were told, by some of our guard, that the horses we met during the day all belonged to a single hacienda, which we should reach on the following night. The Mexicans related stories that appeared almost incredible in relation to the former prosperity and richness of this hacienda, and the immense number of horses and mules owned at one time by its proprietor. They even went so far as to say, that but a short time prior to the Revolution no less than *three hundred thousand horses* were in the possession of the lady who was then the owner of the estate. Whether this story was true or false I am unable to say; but however incredible it may appear, the story is robbed of much of its extravagance when it is stated that her possessions extended some fifty miles on either side of the road.

Our second day's journey from Cerro Gordo was one of some twenty-five miles, yet we were constantly in sight of horses and mules. They were generally in droves of about fifty, each gang herded by a single Mexican, whose only business it was to see that none of them strayed away. Towards nightfall we reached a large hacienda by the roadside, an estate owned by the mistress of the immense tract upon which the horses were pastured. She is a widow, I believe; and although comparatively poor when the immense wealth of some of the former proprietors is taken into consideration, is still the owner of fifty thousand horses and

mules, large herds of cattle and sheep, immense fields of corn and wheat, and has several thousand *peons* at her different haciendas.

To show the immense wealth of one of the former proprietors of this estate, who, like the present, was a widow, I will relate one little anecdote told us while we were there. A short time previous to that revolution which resulted in the separation of Mexico from Spain, and while the estate I have just alluded to was at the zenith of its prosperity, a regiment of dragoons arrived from Spain and landed at Tampico. This regiment was one thousand strong, and of course the men did not bring their horses with them. The colonel of the regiment happening to be a friend of the family of the wealthy proprietress, and well known to her deceased husband, she immediately sent him a thousand white horses as a present, for the use of his regiment. There was hardly a month's difference in the ages of these horses, and every one of them had been raised upon her estate. While we were there, a number of horses were brought to our encampment to be sold, and two or three were disposed of at prices ranging from seven to ten dollars—horses that would readily command from sixty to eighty dollars in the United States. A very well-made and showy bay, of fine action, and not more than five years old, was offered for twenty-five dollars. I am confident he would readily command two hundred dollars in any part of the United States.

And how, it will be asked, is the labour on this immense estate, and others of its kind, effected, and who are the workmen? I have already said that the mistress of the estate had several thousand *peons* or labourers upon its different branches, and to these unfortunate vassals, for they cannot be called by any other name,

are the rich proprietors of Mexico indebted for all their wealth.

The Constitution of Mexico guaranties, to all classes and colours, the greatest liberty and equality—the poorest peasant is protected, by the glorious panoply of the law, from every infringement upon his personal liberty—and the most abject beggar in the land has rights and privileges which cannot be trampled upon by his neighbour, be he ever so powerful or wealthy.* So much for the law and Constitution in theory—the practice is an entirely different matter.

The traveller who visits one of the larger estates in Mexico, finds, in the centre of it, a village, or collection of houses, large or small in proportion to the quantity of land owned by the proprietor. Occupying the most conspicuous situation is the church, generally a strong stone building surmounted by a tower or cupola, with a clear, silvery-sounding bell. The interior is decorated, perhaps, with statues of our Saviour, the Apostles, the Virgin, and the patron saint of the hacienda, executed in wood, and frequently arrayed most fantastically; the walls are covered with wretched copies of Scriptural paintings. Close by the church is the residence of the haciennero, or owner, a massive, strong, roomy, but comparatively unfurnished dwelling, in one of the front apartments of which is his store. Here the poor peons purchase their liquor, their cigars, and the little cloth that furnishes their raiment, and at prices the most exorbitant. Adjoining this house are the *trajes*, or barns, where the produce of the estate is stored—strong, substantial buildings. Then come the rude adobe hovels of the common labourers, frequently having but one

* Such was the case while I was in Mexico: as the Constitution is changed, on an average, every six months, a different state of things may exist now.

room, in which the whole family, father and mother, brothers and sisters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, huddle together upon one common earthen floor.

And what relation do these people bear to the haciennero? They are many of them slaves—slaves to all intents and purposes, although they may enjoy a nominal liberty. A large proportion of them, probably, are in some way indebted to the proprietor, the law giving him a lien upon their services until such debts are paid; but most especial good care does he take that they never pay him their obligations so long as their services are in any way profitable. They are in his debt, and are kept so until age or infirmity renders their labour unproductive; then the obligation is cancelled, and they are cast upon the world, to beg, steal, or starve, as best they may.

Should some one of the peons, more active, ambitious, or enterprising than his fellows, chance to accumulate money enough to repay his debt and regain his liberty, how then? He offers his master the price of his redemption, but the latter, upon some flimsy pretext, refuses to take it—he has not yet done with the services of the vigorous servant. The latter flies to the *alcalde* for redress. The law is on his side, equity is on his side, but the functionary who administers them is very likely a creature of the proprietor, and will not listen to the case of the slave, be it ever so just. The latter attempts to purchase justice by a bribe, but he is outbid by the haciennero. The *alcalde* shuts his eyes upon justice, opens his hand to the longer purse of the proprietor, and the unfortunate serf is once more driven to bondage. Such, so far as I could see and learn, was the state of things at many of the haciendas we passed upon our journey. The immense wealth, which has

fallen into the hands of the few in Mexico, has given them a power over the numerous and abjectly poor which amounts nearly to that of the English barons under the feudal system—never will there be a change in favour of the lower orders until a thorough and radical revolution takes place in the very natures of the inhabitants, or until the country falls into other hands.

To resume my narrative. On the 14th of December, our men now much improved and invigorated by the substantial and bountiful supply of food furnished them, we passed the Palo Chino, encamping at a hacienda a few miles farther on. It was at this place, the name of which I did not ascertain, that we had still farther reason to admire the conduct of Colonel Velasco. Calling the officers and merchants together, amounting to some eighteen or twenty, he told us that he had every confidence in our words, and that while in his charge we should be permitted to go where we pleased on our parole of honour. No guard was to accompany us—the only exaction he made, and even that was in the shape of a request, was that we should all be in attendance every morning when the trumpet sounded an advance.

From this time we enjoyed the greatest liberty. When night came, we could select any meron, at the place where we were halted, to sleep in, and could roam about at will. The same liberty would have been granted our men, but that among them were several drunken, worthless fellows, ever ready to abuse every privilege allowed them. The larger portion of the Texans were well-educated, intelligent men, possessing all self-respect; yet they were obliged to suffer from the bad conduct of a few of their associates in imprisonment.

CHAPTER VI.

Arrival at El Gallo, or The Cock.—Singular Names for Towns.—A rich Silver Mine.—Scenes at a Fandango.—The Well of El Gallo.—Arrival at Dolores.—Guadaloupe.—The Prisoners reach Cuencamé.—A small Party of us quartered at the House of a Castilian.—Hospitable Treatment.—Strange Superstition in relation to a Statue.—Gullibility of the Poorer Classes.—We are turned over to a new Guard.—Selling a Watch.—La Señorita Juana.—Colonel Velasco takes leave of the Prisoners.—Captain Roblado.—Story in relation to him.—Superiority of the Bread of Cuencamé.—Our Departure.—Hacienda of Juan Perez.—Roblado, and his Treatment of an Alcalde.—A tedious March.—Arrival at San Sebastian.—Frightened Girls and wounded Dogs.—Freaks and Endurance of the genus Donkey.—Arrival at Saenea.—Picturesque Situation of the Town.—The Maguey Plant; its Uses and Abuses.—One Drink of Pulque sufficient.—A Gang of "Involuntary Volunteers."—Mode of Recruiting for the Mexican Army.—Rancho Grande.—Decay in Mexico.—An American Traveller.—Arrival at Fresnillo.—The Mines in the Vicinity.—Meeting with an Englishman.—The *Tienda del Gato*.—Stories and Egg-nog.—More "Involuntary Volunteers."—A Stage-coach, and Thoughts of Home.—La Caleta.—First Appearance of Small-pox among the Texans.

EARLY on the afternoon of the 15th of December we reached the small village of El Gallo, or The Cock.* It is situated at the foot of a rough and precipitous hill, on the sides of which, it was said, a rich vein of silver ore had just been discovered. This, I wish it to be understood, was but a Mexican story; I give my authority, lest some mining adventurer should be drawn to the spot in search of treasure, which probably has no existence, save in the imagination of the ignorant and gossiping inhabitants.

At night, a fandango was given at the house of the alcalde, attended by some half dozen of the prisoners as well as the very élite of El Gallo. One of the girls was

* The Mexicans give queer names to some of their smaller towns. I recollect sleeping one night at the town of Wheelbarrow.