

While we were waiting for our meal, a monk or friar, of some poor and abstemious order, entered the apartment with a noiseless step. Tied about him with a piece of rope was a coarse blanket or gown, of a grayish yellow colour; his head was bare, the top of it being close shaven; and he may have been barefooted, for I do not recollect seeing either boot, shoe, or sandal upon his feet. In his hand he had a small tin box, resembling, in many respects, a lantern. At all events, I took it for a lantern; for as the room was but dimly lighted, and as he silently held the box close to my face, I thought he was endeavouring to scrutinize my countenance with the hope of recognising me by some mysterious and hidden light it might contain. A *galopina*, or kitchen girl, standing by, soon explained the business of the holy brother by dropping a quartillo into the box through a hole in the top, which I had not previously seen. Now the mystery was solved—the friar was holding the box in my face for alms. Fearing that I might have insulted him by rudely, although innocently, staring in his face, I resolved upon purchasing forgiveness to such extent as a quarter of a dollar would obtain, and accordingly dropped a coin of that value into the box. The amount purchased my pardon, if he thought I owed him one; for, making a low bow, he gave me his *benedicte*, and then, with dignified meekness, left the room.

Weary from our long walk, and the early morning ride, we remained no longer than to obtain our supper, and then retired to our quarters at the old convent, meeting with neither obstruction nor insult on the way.

CHAPTER X.

Departure from Queretaro.—A stupendous Aqueduct.—View of Queretaro from a Mountain Summit.—Number and Magnificence of its Churches.—Meeting with Englishmen.—News that Colonel Cooke's Party were in Chains.—The Diligence.—Letter from Mr. Lumsden.—Liberation of Frank Combs.—Arrival at San Juan del Rio.—Escape of two of our Companions.—They are retaken and punished.—The Indian Village of Tula.—Strange Celebration.—Queer Characters.—Crackers and Sky-rockets.—Approach to the City of Mexico.—Speculations as to our future Lot.—Mr. Navarro separated from his Companions.—Route altered.—“Quien Sabe?”—Kindness of the Indian Women.—Arrival at the old Palace of San Cristobal.—The Texans locked within its gloomy Walls.—Visited by Mr. Lumsden and other Americans.—A joyful Meeting.—Prospects of Release.—Description of San Cristobal.—Release of Falconer and Van Ness.—Visited by Members of the United States Legation.—Difference in the Policy of the United States and English Governments.—Cause of Mr. Falconer's Release.—Another Visit from the Americans.—File of American Papers.—A Letter from Chihuahua, and its Effects.—Gloomy Presentiments.—Our Men supplied with Clothing and Blankets.—Celebration in Honour of Santa Anna's Leg.—Supplies cut off.—Sufferings on the Increase.—Nothing to Eat.—Resorts of the Texans to obtain Food.—Singular Tribunals, with the Results.—A Humorous Witness.—Wild Revel in San Cristobal.

IMMEDIATELY on leaving Queretaro, our road took us directly under the immense aqueduct which supplies the city with water. This aqueduct is a stupendous work, having been built many years since, by the Spaniards, when money was abundant and Indian labour easy to command. Pure water is carried by this means across a wide valley, the head spring being on a mountain side at a distance of some six or eight miles. The arches which support the stupendous fabric are of stone, lofty yet light, and of graceful proportions. Far as the eye can reach, the aqueduct is seen stretching across the valley; now rising high above the surface of the ground

as some low place is crossed, and again all but touching the higher undulations. At the point where we passed under one of the arches, and we were on the direct road to the city of Mexico, the water must have been forty or fifty feet above us—perhaps more.

After proceeding but a few miles, we commenced the ascent of a steep and lofty chain of mountains. Once at their summit, the view of Queretaro, and the beautiful valley in which it lies, is one of the finest and most lovely in all Mexico. The number of inhabitants in the city we had just left does not probably exceed fifty thousand, but as is the case in every large town of the country, there are churches enough to supply the spiritual wants of six times that number in the United States. These churches, too, are built upon a scale, both in size and magnificence, to which we are perfect strangers, and give an appearance of splendour to their cities which without them would sink into comparative insignificance.

While stopping for a short time to rest, during the middle of the day, the diligence drove up on its way from the city of Mexico to Guanajuato. Among the passengers were two or three Englishmen, who informed us that in consequence of the escape of two of the men attached to Colonel Cooke's party, they had all been placed in irons. As to what disposition Santa Anna would finally make of them, they could give us nothing but mere speculation and idle rumour.

During our next day's march we again met the stage ascending a high, steep hill. The driver stopped to allow a passenger, an American gentleman, to alight for a moment. He inquired for me, and gave me a letter which I at once knew was from Mr. Lumsden. I have already mentioned that I had heard, while at Guana-

juato, of one of my partners having reached the city of Mexico for the purpose of obtaining my liberation as speedily as possible, but my informant could not give me his name, and until this moment I did not know which of my associates was thus exerting himself in my behalf.

It will be readily supposed that I devoured the contents of this letter with no little avidity. It was to the effect that young Frank Combs had been liberated, and that every exertion should be made to effect my speedy release on reaching the city. I had all along supposed that the Mexican government could not possibly detain me twenty-four hours, after a statement of the manner of my arrest and the circumstances attending it was properly laid before those in authority by Mr. Ellis, our then minister; but in these anticipations I was destined to be most grievously disappointed. Santa Anna had no idea of letting me off so easily.

We arrived at the town of San Juan del Rio on the evening of January 27th. This place is situated upon a small river, and is the last town of any note before the traveller reaches Mexico, although the remainder of the road runs through a succession of villages. We met two or three Americans at San Juan, who only corroborated the story that our comrades in Mexico were chained in couples and compelled to toil in the streets.

We had proceeded but a short distance the next day before it was discovered, among ourselves, that two of our men had made their escape—frightened to this step probably by the stories of chains and servitude. We said nothing about it at the time; but when our guard counted us at night the fact of their having escaped became known. They were afterward retaken by a small party sent out for the purpose, closely guarded to

the city of Mexico, and there thrown into that vilest of holes, the *Acordada*, as a punishment for their offence. With but a single exception, this was the only unsuccessful attempt made to escape while we were in the country.

Early in the afternoon of the 1st of February we reached the large Indian village of Tula, some ten or twelve leagues from the city of Mexico. Scarcely had we entered the quarters which had been provided for us, at a commodious meson fronting immediately upon the market-square, when a confused shouting was heard in one of the streets leading into the plaza—a hubbub as of boys following a military volunteer company in the United States. Before we had time to reach a corner of the square, whence the shouting appeared to come, we encountered a medley and most singular procession of ragged Indians. Preceding them was an eccentric and oddly-attired personage, who appeared not only to act as master of ceremonies, but took it upon himself to sell invitations to join in the grand procession and a mass which accompanied it. One of these invitations I purchased. It was written on a page of foolscap paper, the edges embellished with a wide and gaudy border, within which was a quotation in Spanish from the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew, thirty-ninth verse—"O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Then followed a short sketch of the sufferings of our Savior, of his great love for our fallen race, and of his betrayal by Judas, while at the bottom of all was an invitation in terms somewhat like the following: "Captain Don Lauriano Rodea and friends supplicate your assistance on the 1st and 2d days of February," and the invitation which supplicated for this assistance was sold for *dos reales*—twenty-five cents.

In advance of the procession walked, or rather jumped, two grotesque and diabolical figures. Of the sex, colour, or condition of these actors in the crowd we could form no opinion. Their faces, save the eyes and teeth, were completely hidden by hideous masks of black crape, while their bodies were covered with a dingy, dirty black dress, fitting closely to the skin. They did not walk, but crooked their knees, crouched their bodies as close to the ground as possible, and then hopped about after the manner of orang-outangs or kangaroos. Whenever a door was passed, at which stood some girl fairer and better clad than usual, one of those grotesque figures would hop hurriedly after her, grin hideously with his white teeth, and so frighten the pursued that she would instantly seek shelter within the house. These little innocent eccentricities on the part of the gentleman in black, who performed the most wonderful feats of agility while hopping from point to point, were much relished by the crowd of boys and idlers in attendance upon the procession. I was unable to make out the characters sustained by these imps of darkness; but whether devils or Judases, they certainly well sustained their parts, in action and appearance.

Immediately in their rear followed some four or five swarthy, dirty-faced, half-grown boys, dressed to represent angels, although they were like almost anything else. Their once white robes were soiled and stained until they had become a dirty yellow; their wings were unhinged, broken, discoloured, and draggling; their thick, uncombed hair was filled with withered flowers, or encircled with faded wreaths; their gait was awkward and swaggering, and, take them altogether, a sorer set of angels were probably never let loose upon earth. Had they been personating angels of darkness,

their aspect certainly would have been appropriate, to say nothing of their acting. It was shrewdly suspected that one or two of these good spirits had been partaking rather more freely of aguardiente than became their calling. The tail of the procession was a rabble of men, women, and children, the latter improving every moment in letting off squibs and crackers among the throng.

At the church, whither we followed the crowd, a short service appeared to end the ceremonies, at least for that day; for after it was concluded, the good and evil spirits broke up the order of march, and mingled promiscuously with the swarthy populace. So far as the sending up of rockets, and other exhibitions of the like nature, went—for, without fireworks, a Mexican celebration is incomplete—the strange mummeries were kept up until a late hour. Such were the performances at Tula on the 1st of February; what they were on the 2d I know not, although I had purchased an invitation to take part in them.

With the supposition that we were that evening to be marched into the great city of the Montezumas, we left Tula at an early hour in the morning. We had now been some three months and a half upon the road, journeying through twenty degrees of latitude, and exposed to hardships and privations innumerable. The fate of all, whether good or evil, was soon to be decided. Upon the flimsy pretext that one or two of their companions had escaped, we knew that Santa Anna had chained Colonel Cooke's men, and what was worse, had sent them to work in the streets and ditches—a punishment awarded only to criminals. Was our fate to be the same? The mind of each man was racked to answer the question—speculation only ended in doubt and uncertainty.

We had supposed that we were to be marched directly into the city, which, by the middle of the day, was only concealed by a mountain, when at a fork of the road a halt was called. At this point Mr. Navarro was separated from us, for what reason no one could divine. Under a strong guard he was conducted directly towards the city, while we were ordered to pursue the left-hand fork of the road, which led we knew not whither. We asked the dragoons, riding on either side of us, as to our destination. Our only answer was the eternal "*quien sabe?*" The Mexicans of the lower classes, if unable to answer a question, instead of giving a decided negative, invariably use this exclamation of "*quien sabe?*" the literal meaning of which is "who knows?" thus answering one question by asking another. The expression is, however, equivalent to "*I don't know*" in English.

Our route now took us through a thickly-settled and tolerably well-cultivated country, although squalid poverty was to be seen on every side. The half-dressed, swarthy Indian women, with their black but mild and pensive eyes, came running from the adobe houses, many of them in tears at our sad and wretched appearance; for by this time some twenty of our party were down with the small-pox and other diseases. Murmuring the universal exclamation, *pobrecitos*, they would divide *tomales*,* *tortillas*, fruit—in short, their little all—among men whom they must have supposed to be on the road to execution.

About noon, and after passing a poor village with a large and once magnificent church, the celebrated lake of San Cristobal appeared in sight. A few hundred

* The *tomale* is made of meal, with a slight mixture of red pepper and meat. It is then wrapped in the husks of corn and boiled.

yards farther we were halted in front of the old Palace of San Cristobal, once a celebrated summer residence of the Spanish viceroys, but long since deserted, and now fast crumbling to decay. We were ordered to enter its wide doorway; but why we were brought to a place so desolate and gloomy no one could imagine. The captain of our guard shrugged his shoulders when interrogated as to the cause of this singular movement, and after saying that he had been ordered to lock us up in San Cristobal, briefly remarked that he had obeyed his orders.

The key had hardly turned in the lock when three or four horsemen, evidently foreigners from their style of dress and riding, were seen galloping towards us across the plain. They pulled up in front of our miserable quarters, and on alighting I for the first time recognised Mr. Lumsden as of the party. After a short conference with the captain of our guard, and leaving their pistols and knives with the sentinels at the door, for no traveller ever rides to the outskirts of the city of Mexico without arms, the party were allowed to enter.

That I was overjoyed at meeting with Mr. L. may easily be imagined. His companions were American gentlemen, residing in the city of Mexico. Learning early in the morning that the prisoners were approaching, they had ordered horses and immediately come out to meet us. Finding that we had taken a different road, on reaching the fork where Mr. Navarro had been separated from us, they followed upon our track until they at length found us securely locked up within the crumbling walls of the old Palace of San Cristobal.

As regarded my own prospects of release, my friends gave me every encouragement. They appeared san-

guine that but a few days would elapse before I should regain that liberty of which I had been so unjustly deprived for nearly five months; and as the afternoon was now far advanced, and the distance some twelve miles to the city, they took their leave, after promising to visit us again the next day.

The Palace of San Cristobal is pleasantly situated upon a plain, and immediately in front are the lake of the same name, and one of the canals to be met with in the valley of Mexico. In the immediate vicinity there are no buildings, save the miserable mud-hovels of a few poor wretches, whose means of procuring an honest livelihood must be precarious indeed. Directly in front of the palace, the range of mountains which divides the valley of Mexico from that of Puebla was seen in the distance, while to the right one of the high and snow-capped volcanoes, which give to the scenery of Mexico its grandeur and sublimity, was seen rising far among the clouds. In clear weather the mountain-top is plainly visible, as is also the volcano upon its side; but on the day of our arrival the atmosphere betokened rain, and its summit was covered with a fleecy veil of clouds.

The building in which we were confined may have been a very respectable palace in its day, but when we were there it would hardly afford shelter for the bats our presence frightened from their retreats. It is two stories high, and built in the fashion of nearly all the large houses of Mexico, in a quadrangular form, having a patio or court-yard in the centre. The entrance was through a large gateway. The ground floor of the front part of the building contained four rooms, while in the second story was a large dining hall, flanked by a bedroom at one end and a small kitchen at the other.