

with not a little anxiety, the arrival of some one of my friends, to whom I might confide my secret and upon whose assistance I might depend.

CHAPTER XIV.

Hours of Expectation.—One of the Santiago Prisoners brought to San Lazaro, sick with the Small-pox.—Disappointed Hopes.—Arrival of a Guard of Soldiers at San Lazaro.—Mysterious Conduct of the Commander.—Ordered to prepare for Departure.—A vile Litter produced.—Refusal to enter it.—Leave San Lazaro.—“Farewells” of the Texans and “Adios” of the Lepers.—Gloomy and mysterious night March.—Interior of the City of Mexico.—Stared at by the Populace.—A Coach ordered.—Misery likes Company.—Dogs in the Outskirts of Mexico.—Arrive at our Destination.—Farther Uncertainty.—Ushered into the Presence of Women.—The Mystery unravelled.—Find myself in Santiago, and among Friends.—Ordered to make Choice of a Partner in Chains.—Select Major Bennett.—First Appearance in Fetters.—Congratulations of my Friends on the Occasion.—Major Bennett quotes Scripture again.—Determination to escape.—Santa Anna’s Motives in the Removal to San Lazaro.—Action of the Mexican and United States Governments in relation to the American Prisoners.—Consider the Chances of Liberation as hopeless as ever.—Strange Conduct of Santa Anna.—No Difficulty in shaking off the Irons.—The “Secrets of our Prison-house.”—Character of the old Commandante of Santiago.—Texan Tricks upon a Mexican Blacksmith.—The Blacksmith and Santa Anna in Converse.—Description of Santiago, and Chances of an Escape.—The Texans going out to labour in the Streets.—More Play than Work.

THE hours after dinner dragged heavily along, but no one called to whom I could make known my contemplated escape. About the middle of the afternoon a young man named Bowen, one of Colonel Cooke’s party, was brought to San Lazaro from Santiago, very ill with the small-pox. He was delirious, giving incoherent answers to the different questions asked him.

Night finally set in, yet not a single foreigner made

his appearance. This was the more remarkable, as several of them had promised to call upon me that afternoon. There appeared to be a strange fatality in the circumstance, that at the very time when I most wanted to see the face of a friend, no one came; but there was no help for it, and I saw the door locked with a heart made heavy by disappointment. The only consolation I had was, that the same opportunity to escape would probably be open on the ensuing day, and with this expectation I retired to my cot and soon fell asleep.

About half past nine o’clock at night I was awakened by a heavy tramp, as of men marching past me. On opening my eyes, I saw eight or ten soldiers paraded directly in front of my cot, with shouldered muskets. Not a little astonished at a circumstance so unusual, I was about to inquire the cause, when the officer in command of the party, after asking my name, said I must immediately prepare to leave San Lazaro.

I asked him whither I was to be taken, but he gave me no answer. There was something mysterious in the air of this man that caused me much uneasiness, but I was completely in his power and could only obey his commands. While I was hastily slipping on my clothes, and packing my books and other articles in a carpet bag, the lepers congregated about me with not a little astonishment depicted in their dismal countenances. I had formed a kind of distant intimacy with many of the unfortunate wretches, and their surprise was equal to my own on learning that “Don Jorge,” as they called me, was about to be taken from San Lazaro under so strong a guard, and at an hour so strange and unseasonable. I thought of my dealings with the pole, and for a moment supposed that this unusual movement

might be caused by my having been discovered in the act; but of this I was uncertain.

After a few hasty preparations, I told the officer I was ready to accompany him; but first I asked him if he would allow me to ride. He immediately ordered his men to bring in a litter, and pointing to it, told me I could ride in that. The litter had a vile, filthy blanket in it, and had evidently been used to transport some worthless or wounded lepero to a hospital or dungeon; but what gave me more uneasiness than all were the words "*Carcel de Ciudad*"—city prison—painted upon its sides. That I was to be taken to some vile hole, and thrown alone among the most worthless and abandoned wretches, was now evident enough, and I could scarcely restrain a shudder at the thought of a fate so horrible.

Again I asked the officer if he would send one of his men for a coach, telling him that I had money to pay for it, and that one of my ankles was so weak that I was fearful, from not having taken much exercise of late, of its failure if I had far to walk. He only answered me by pointing to the litter. Determined, under no circumstances, to ride or be carried in a conveyance so vile, I told him I would endeavour to walk. My mattress and blankets, which were my own property, together with the carpet bag, were now thrown into the litter, the guard formed on either side of me, and amid the "adios" of the poor lepers, and the kind "farewells" of my companions, I was escorted out of San Lazaro. I turned one look, as I passed the threshold, at the companions of my imprisonment, but not a gleam of hope's sunshine could I discover in their sorrowful countenances. In moments of sudden trial or peril, how much of the mind's workings, how much of

the inward emotions, can be read while hastily scanning the faces of those around us. I keenly scrutinized the features of the crowd gathered at the door to see my departure—commiseration, pity, all the kindlier feelings of man's nature were there, but not one glimmering of assurance as to the fate that awaited me could I discover, no key to unlock the mystery in which the movements of my guard were hidden. With a heavy heart I bade the inmates of San Lazaro farewell, and I doubt whether one of them, either Mexican or Texan, expected ever to see me again.

On reaching the front door of the hospital, the officer in command ordered a halt. He then took me into the small office connected with the establishment, and gave the major-domo a receipt to the effect that I had been regularly delivered into his hands. I once more requested him to send one of the guard for a coach—a request which he only answered by pointing to the litter.

Outside the hospital, the officer now formed his men, some five or six on either side of me, a trumpeter in the rear, and himself in front. In this order we marched from San Lazaro, the course taken leading directly towards the heart of the city. For the first four or five blocks my ankle gave me little or no pain, the uncertainty which shrouded my destination probably drawing my attention from all personal inconvenience; but as we entered the better portion of the city, and were leaving the low and miserable habitations which form the outskirts of Mexico, my ankle began to give way under the unwonted exercise.

Two or three times I asked the soldiers who were marching next me whither we were going: the eternal "*quien sabe?*" was the only answer.

We had now proceeded some half or three quarters

of a mile on our mysterious journey, and had entered the better part of the city, when my ankle began to pain me excessively. I stopped for a moment, and in eloquent bad Spanish told the Mexican officer my situation. He shrugged his shoulders, and still pointed to the filthy litter, which was borne by two of his men. Had my ankle been perfectly sound at this time, such were my feelings, I should most certainly have broken through the guard which surrounded me, and put the chance of an escape upon a run, regardless of their muskets. As it was, I could but hobble along, and submit to being guarded, I knew not whither.

As we approached the centre of the city, although it was now almost eleven o'clock at night, we met numbers passing. My dress plainly denoted that I was no countryman of theirs, for I wore a blanket coat I had purchased of an American at Chihuahua, and an American hat. The sight of a foreigner thus attired, and thus strongly guarded through the streets at an hour so unseasonable, excited not a little curiosity in the passers-by, and they crowded under the lamps and peered inquisitively in my face.

We passed several churches, and once or twice we were halted for a few moments directly in front of large gloomy edifices, which I could not but think were prison-houses. I was not allowed to march upon the sidewalk, but was taken directly along the middle of the streets, where the walking was rough and uneven, and where my ankle was liable to be strained or injured at every step. Driven at length almost to desperation, not only by pain, but by the uncertainty with which I was surrounded, I forced myself between two of the soldiers who guarded me, and sat down upon the sidewalk directly in front of a large church. The offi-

cer ordered me to rise and continue the march, but I told him I could walk no farther.

Anxious, probably, to be relieved as soon as possible of his charge, the officer now consented to send one of his soldiers for a coach; and being near one of the great coach-stands of the city, he soon returned with the conveyance I was so much in need of. I immediately entered the heavy and clumsy vehicle, the officer following and seating himself by my side. The soldiers were then formed on either side, and at a brisk pace the strange night march was resumed.

On several occasions the coach stopped for a moment, probably to give the guard rest, and each time I scanned the buildings on either side with an eager gaze, expecting to see some dismal prison. Had there been a single companion with me, for misery *does* like company, I should not have been so oppressed by the sickly feelings I experienced; but I was alone, and could only brood over my singular and annoying situation in silence.

A half-hour's ride carried us almost entirely through the city, and after leaving the poorer habitations of the suburbs, we emerged into the open country. Passing now and then a small house, from which some score of noisy dogs would jump and bark at us, the coach finally drew up in front of a large and gloomy establishment, walled in on two of its sides, where a halt was called. It was now near midnight. I asked the officer what building it was; but he was stepping from the coach at the time, and either did not hear or did not heed my question.

I had hardly left the coach before I heard the startling "*centinela alerta!*" from a soldier directly over my head. The cry was taken up by another in a dif-

ferent part of the building, then by another, until at length I could but faintly hear the long-drawn-out and to me grating sounds feebly echoed and re-echoed from the more distant walls of the building. Around the passage-way which led to the establishment, groups of soldiers, rolled up in their cloaks and blankets, were lying asleep, and a regular guard was marching backward and forward in the entrance. I was soon taken, still strongly guarded, through the main door of entrance. Once within, I found a large yard, surrounded on all sides by buildings, and by the dim light of a lamp I could plainly read the word *castigo*—punishment—over a strong and gloomy door. In this apartment, I at once thought I should find a resting-place; but who were to be my companions, or what the cause of my imprisonment, I could not imagine.

Not a little overjoyed was I when the guard, who even to this time was stationed on either side of me, marched by this dreadful room and led me up a flight of stone steps on the other side of the yard. We now groped our way along a dark passage, the floor of stone, and every footfall sending up a doleful echo. Once, by the dim light of a distant lantern, I saw the gloomy figures of two or three monks, slowly wending their way towards their silent cloister, and again all was darkness.

Groping his way a few steps in advance of us, the officer who had me in charge at length reached a small door, at which he knocked. A female voice within asked him for the countersign. He gave it, the door slowly opened, and I was ushered into a small but neatly-furnished apartment, having a guitar and several pieces of music scattered about, while a sideboard and other articles of furniture graced the sides of the room.

Two females were present — one a lady-like woman some thirty-five years of age, the other a pretty girl of not more than sixteen, and both were undressed as if just from bed. After they had politely beckoned me to a chair, I asked the elder for some water, which she gave me after inquiring whether I would not prefer a glass of wine. The kindness of these women gave me hope, which was soon banished, however, by the entrance, from another room, of an elderly and grim-visaged officer, apparently some sixty years of age. He had a morose scowl upon his face, and his upper lip was decked with a pair of mustaches which might have been cut from a shoe-brush.

He asked my name, entered it in a book which was lying upon the table, and after telling the officer who had charge of me that all was right, ordered him, with a cold, business-like air, to march off and lock me up. By a different passage I was now taken to the yard below, and halted in front of a large and strong door. A key was applied to the lock, and while they were slowly turning it I could plainly hear the clanking of chains and the indistinct hum of voices within. This was the most trying moment of all, for I was profoundly ignorant alike of the place and of the companions I was to be associated with.

The door was at length opened. A loud shout arose as I entered the room, and my name was called by fifty voices in a breath. Never can I forget my own feelings when, with spirits but a few moments before depressed by a suspense the most harrowing, I now found myself suddenly and most unexpectedly in Santiago, greeted by Colonel Cooke, Dr. Brenham, Captain Sutton, and the friends whom I had not seen for seven

months. The prospect of chains and servitude was as nothing—I was among my old companions.

By far the greater number of the prisoners were asleep when I entered the room; yet there were some twenty still awake, engaged at cards upon the stone floor, or reading by the dim light of Mexican candles. After half an hour's conversation with my friends, I spread my cot among them—a refreshing sleep following a day replete with excitement.

Immediately after breakfast the next morning, the Mexican who had charge of the Texan chain gang politely requested me to choose a partner from among the prisoners—some one to assist me in carrying the heavy fetters which were now to decorate one of my ankles for the first time. The recollection of the favourable opportunity I had to escape from San Lazaro the day before now flashed across my mind, and I deeply regretted that fate had prevented me from improving it; but as this was no time to speculate long on the past, or indulge in idle regrets, I commenced a survey of my fellow-prisoners with the intention of making a choice. It fell upon the veteran Major Bennett, of scripture-quoting memory. One end of his chain was vacant, owing to the sickness of his comrade at the time; but what induced me more particularly to make choice of him, was a sly wink he gave me, and a side speech to the effect that he had a way of ridding himself of the fetters which few of the Texans possessed.

We were now conducted to a small room, adjoining that in which the prisoners were locked up for the night. Here an anvil had been placed for the business, and the room was decorated with rings, rivets, chains, and other instruments of disgrace. I slipped a dollar into the hands of the Mexican whose duty it was to

fasten the trinkets upon me. This I had been advised to do by my friends, as it would induce the fellow, either to give me a ring so large that I could slip it off, or so to fasten the rivet that I could remove it with but little difficulty. The dollar had the desired effect, for the Mexican selected a ring which I could easily remove after taking off my boot.

With as good a grace as I could assume—for this chaining a man excites any feelings but those of a pleasant nature—I now submitted to the operation. The chain was some eight feet in length, extremely heavy, and of the class used to draw logs with oxen—in other words, a log chain. After cutting the straps from a pair of fashionable, French pantaloons, which I had purchased at Zacatecas, I placed my foot upon the anvil, and the Mexican, although well knowing that I could shake myself free with ease, hammered away and made as much noise as though the chain was to remain upon my ankle for life.

A knot of my fellow-prisoners gathered about me during the operation, and made themselves exceedingly facetious at my expense. One of them, accompanying the remark with a shake of his foot that made his own chain clank again, assured me that I should find it agreeable enough *after* I got used to it. Another said it was not half so bad as pulling teeth; and still another remarked that chaining one's leg was far less painful than sawing it off. A musical genius commenced humming Bruce's Address, laying emphatic stress upon the line

“Chains and slavery;”

while another individual, gifted slightly with vocal abilities, essayed the ditty commencing with

“Liberty for me.”