

Even Major Bennett, although not much given to humorous remarks, could not resist the opportunity of being facetious. With a gravity which would have become a graven image, he pretended to comfort me with the remark that we all have our trials and tribulations, quoted a verse from Job to the effect that useless repining was of little avail, and wound up by saying that the time would yet come when our bonds would all be rent asunder.

While all this was in progress, I felt indignant enough fairly to eat half a dozen links of the chain attached to my ankle, but I still forced a laugh, and assumed a cheerfulness of demeanour when I felt much more like shedding tears from very vexation. Thoughts, too, of an escape, of an immediate escape, ran through my mind with such rapidity that twenty half-digested plans to effect my liberty were formed and abandoned in half as many minutes. I now considered myself cut off from all hope of release through the interference of my own government, and resolved to run every risk, and go to any expense, to achieve my liberation. In this frame of mind I went back to the main room in which the prisoners were confined, myself and companion dragging the heavy chain after us. My friends congratulated me upon my appearance in the "trinkets," and one of them, pointing to the chain, humorously remarked that I must now feel *bound* to the major by the *strongest ties*! This was on the morning of the 19th of April.

Up to this time I have never been able to fathom or ascertain Santa Anna's motives in having me removed from San Lazaro to Santiago. Clothed in mystery as the movements of the Mexicans generally are, and delighting as they do in a dark and covert policy, there was something unusually strange in the hour chosen,

the strong guard sent to secure my safe conduct, and the fact that the officer who commanded the guard appeared studiously to avoid giving me any clew as to my destination.

But to show my readers in what a veil of mystery the whole affair was shrouded, I will here revert to the negotiations which had been pending, for the previous three or four days, in relation to the liberation of myself, and of six other Americans who had claimed the protection of the United States government.

On the 14th of April, Mr. Ellis, who was then shortly to leave Mexico, had an interview with Santa Anna in relation to the cases of these seven Americans. At this interview, Santa Anna expressed himself willing to release the prisoners, but not until certain acts of the United States were explained. He alluded to the fact that at that time the U. S. frigate *Macedonian* was off Vera Cruz, with another American man-of-war, and said that as soon as he received information, from the commandante at Vera Cruz, that these vessels had sailed, he would be pleased to give the prisoners up to Mr. Ellis. While the vessels remained he should be prevented from releasing them, as rumours were prevalent in Mexico that the frigate brought a *demand* for the prisoners, and the Mexican public might charge him with being influenced by their presence in granting a release—in other words, with being frightened into the measure. The result of this interview, which was considered at the time as very favourable to my release, induced Mr. Mayer to call upon me early the next morning with the news—a circumstance I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

On the 16th of April, two days after this interview, Mr. Mayer called upon the Mexican Minister of Foreign

Relations, José Maria de Bocanegra. This call was made about twelve o'clock, at the request of Mr. Ellis, and with the object of ascertaining the farther action of the Mexican government upon the subject of our release. M. de Bocanegra informed Mr. Mayer that he could not tell him at what time the prisoners would be set at liberty, as intelligence of a very disagreeable nature had just been received by the government, which might influence the mind of Santa Anna; but in the mean time the minister requested Mr. Mayer to call upon him again the same evening, when he might expect a more definite answer upon the subject.

About five o'clock Mr. M. called again at the Foreign Office, when M. de Bocanegra enumerated five points of difficulty as to carrying into immediate effect the promise made by Santa Anna, on the 14th, to Mr. Ellis. I give these points as they were taken down in writing by Mr. M., thinking they may interest some of my readers:

First. That young Combs had armed, and was at the head of, a body of hostile persons, under the name of *emigrants*, advancing upon Mexico.

Second. That a Mr. Spencer had been sent from the United States, with despatches to Texas, and that immediately afterward, and in strange coincidence, the Texan blockade of the eastern coast of Mexico had been proclaimed.

Third. That Texas had proclaimed this blockade.

Fourth. That *all* the vessels of war had not yet left Vera Cruz.

Fifth. That the publications in the papers of the United States against Mexico were most unfriendly, inflammatory, and hostile.

Not thinking it his duty to enter into an argument

upon these points, Mr. Mayer asked M. de Bocanegra whether the legation of the United States should consider the negotiations in regard to the release of the seven prisoners as terminated. The minister replied that they were *not* to be considered terminated. Mr. Mayer then wished to know whether the legation should consider the Mexican government as having withdrawn its word as to the release of the prisoners. The minister answered that such was not to be the interpretation—that his own government did not withdraw its word, but only “*suspended*” its operation upon the question—in short, that the “*suspension*” should only be momentary. Those acquainted with the artful, evasive, and temporizing policy of a skilful Mexican diplomatist may readily conceive that this “*momentary suspension*” might be spun out to ten years—and in this light I believe it was viewed by those who were acquainted with the circumstances. At all events, I judged, from the tone of such friends as called upon me the day after this interview, that my chance of release was as hopeless as ever, and this opinion induced me to attempt an escape over the walls of San Lazaro on the Monday following.

At the very time that I was thus contemplating an escape, and while I was anxiously awaiting the arrival of some friend at San Lazaro who would assist me, Mr. Ellis was holding an interview with the ministers de Bocanegra and Trigeros at the Treasury Department. At this interview Mr. E. answered the *five points* which had caused the “*suspension*” of our release, as follows:

First. That he had positive information that Combs had gone home with his father from New-Orleans to Kentucky, and was not engaged in the Texan war upon Mexico.

Second. That Spencer was not a bearer of despatch-

es from the government of the United States to Texas ; but had used the title (as was rumoured) to protect himself from, or to evade, charges affecting him personally.

Third. That the United States had no part, influence, or concern, in the Texan blockade, and, moreover, that if the government he represented entertained hostile designs upon Mexico (which it did not), they would be manifested openly by our own forces, and not secretly, through the navy of another power.

Fourth. That *all* the vessels of war of the United States had actually left Vera Cruz.

Fifth. That the prints of the United States were free—not under the control of the government—and not the organs of its opinions.

In answer to this, M. de Bocanegra wished Mr. Ellis distinctly to understand that the promise of Mexico, for the release of myself and the six other Americans, was given—it was an act concluded—and its operation only momentarily suspended. He farther stated, that he would immediately see Santa Anna, and hoped the conversation he had just held with Mr. E. would so far satisfy the President as to induce him to order the release of the prisoners previous to Mr. Ellis's departure from Mexico, and that they might then accompany him to the United States.

From all this it would seem that my release had been fully and finally determined upon, to take place immediately ; yet but a few hours afterward, and late at night, I was escorted from San Lazaro under a strong guard, and under circumstances the most annoying and mysterious, and taken to Santiago. It could hardly be for my better security, and it would seem almost impossible that any person had seen me removing the pole in the hospital yard of San Lazaro ; whence I can only con-

jecture that the whole proceeding was the result of one of those capricious impulses which appear to govern the conduct of Santa Anna. Perhaps he thought he had not already punished me enough, was anxious to make the most of the short time I was still to be in his power, and therefore sent me to Santiago to give me a taste of life in chains.

The floor of our room at this old convent was of stone, and in the way of furniture we had neither chairs, tables, nor beds. After receiving the *congratulations* of my friends, upon my first appearance in fetters, I threw myself upon a blanket in that quarter of the prison which had been appropriated by Colonel Cooke and Dr. Brenham. The latter immediately began scratching the earth from the chinks between two stones, and soon drew forth a small file which had been secreted there. This he gave me, with directions for filing the rivet that secured the chain to my ankle. I told him that a small bribe had procured for me a ring, which I could easily enough slip over my foot when night came. While this conversation was going on, old Major Bennett quietly released himself from his end of the chain, and stalked off to a corner to peruse some book upon which he was at the time engaged.

I was now initiated into some of the "secrets of the prison-house." The old commandante of the guard—the same person into whose quarters I had been taken the night before, and who had registered my name in the presence of two women—was tyrannical and overbearing in his disposition, and used his best exertions to keep the prisoners continually in chains. The younger officers of the guard, however, were many of them generous and kind-hearted to a fault, and not only furnished our officers with files with which to rid themselves

of their irons during the night, but also winked at any trifling violation of orders, and allowed them to move about without the "trinkets" during the day—only requesting them to avoid being seen by the old commandante. The latter seldom visited the prisoners more than once during the day; and as there was always some one of them to give warning of his approach, the chains were apparently "all right and tight" whenever he entered our quarters.

Every morning a blacksmith from the city was sent to examine and fasten the chains upon each prisoner; yet such adepts had the latter become at "working in iron," that while the knight of the anvil was securing one couple, the pair who had just passed through his hands were very likely loose from their fetters, and performing various antics and exchanging significant nods at the old fellow's expense behind his back.

The blacksmith, it was said, received twelve and a half cents for each rivet he fastened, and as every morning he found nearly all of them loose, the job was an extremely profitable one for him. A good story was told—having, probably, as much foundation in truth as the thousand and one legends and traditions by which the Mexican population is gulled—of an interview the old blacksmith had one morning with Santa Anna. The latter had noticed that a heavy bill was paid daily for fastening the chains of the intractable Texans, and questioned the blacksmith as to the cause. He made answer that the Texans were difficult people to deal with, and had strange ways that he could not understand. Santa Anna asked him how it was that while the simple fastening of a chain upon the ankle of a Mexican was sufficient to secure him for a twelve-month, without putting the government to farther ex-

pense, a Texan was sure to rid himself of the same irons once in every twenty-four hours. This was a question the blacksmith was entirely unable to answer, farther than by informing his Excellency, the Provisional President, that "while he was busily engaged with hammer and anvil, securing one Texan, his comrade at the other end of the chain, and whom he had but just operated upon, not only worked himself free, but very likely *did so at him!*" This latter movement of the Texan the blacksmith explained to Santa Anna by putting his right thumb to his nose, and then performing certain well-known and fanciful gyrations with his fingers. As the story ran, which was of course a fabrication of some wag among the prisoners, the President and the blacksmith, profoundly ignorant of the meaning of a movement so mysterious, came to the conclusion that the Texans had dealings with the prince of darkness, and that it was labour lost to attempt to secure them farther. At all events, the blacksmith suddenly ceased his morning visits, and from that time until the Texans were liberated they were only submitted to an occasional visitation from the Mexican who had charge of the parties sent into the streets to work.

The reader may recollect that on the night when I was escorted from San Lazaro to Santiago, and while the guard who accompanied me were unlocking the door of the room in which the prisoners in the latter place were confined, I mentioned hearing a rattling and clanking of chains. It arose from the circumstance that the prisoners thought the old commandante was paying them a night visit, and on this supposition they commenced fastening their chains with all possible despatch. Upon seeing me enter the room, they shook them off with even greater celerity.

With the fastening of irons upon my ankle went all hope of my being released by Santa Anna. I could not conceive it possible, after subjecting me to this disgrace, that he had the most remote intention of giving me liberty, and accordingly made up my mind at once to attempt an escape. I openly told my friends that I would not remain in Santiago a week, let the risk be what it might, and deeply was I vexed when I recalled to mind the many unimproved opportunities to escape that had presented themselves.

Here I will attempt a description of the convent in which we were confined. It was originally intended for a religious establishment, and some ten or fifteen monks still dwelt within its walls. The front entrance was through a narrow passage-way, having heavy doors on the outer and inner sides, which were both closed at night. In this passage-way many of the soldiers forming our guard slept. It led into a large yard, having heavy stone buildings on each side, and a fountain of excellent water in the centre. The prisoners occupied rooms on two sides of the square below, the other rooms being used as a kitchen, apartments for storing, a hospital, and a room in which mass was said on Sundays. The upper stories were occupied by the monks, by the commandante and his family, and by a number of crippled, invalid, and aged soldiers, veterans in the Mexican service. Outside of the building, on the side next the city, was the balcony from which Lieutenant Lubbock and the Frenchman Mazur had jumped when they made their escape, but the entrance to this balcony from within had been immediately walled up to prevent others from following in their footsteps. On the same side, a flight of stairs led from the second story to a garden below, in which the monks walked or worked

during the day. This garden was surrounded by a low wall, which would have offered but a slight impediment to an escape; but a soldier was constantly stationed at the door leading to the garden, to prevent others than the monks from passing in or out.

There was a passage-way in the rear, corresponding with that which led into the yard in front, but its doors were kept continually locked. This passage led, I believe, to a walled enclosure in which thousands of the victims of cholera were buried in 1833. The back part of our room was destitute of windows, and the walls were extremely thick, so that there was no hope of escape that way. The only means, therefore, of getting away from Santiago with any probability of success, were either to bribe the guard stationed at the front entrance; to procure false keys for the doors leading to the rear, in which case we should also have been compelled to bribe the sentinel at the door of our room; or to walk out of the door leading to the garden in open daylight, and in the disguise of a monk. The latter would have required no associate within the walls, either Texan or Mexican, and I resolved to undertake it, should no more feasible plan offer. I should have taken holy clothes, not holy orders, for a short time, or, in other words, procured a monk's gown and cowl from some one of my friends. Then, by cutting off whiskers and mustaches, of which I had cultivated a liberal quantity for the express purpose of disguising myself; by also shaving the top of my head in imitation of the holy brotherhood, and putting the gown and cowl over my other dress, I could have passed out for a respectable monk—at all events, I should have tried the experiment in case other plans failed.

I had not been in irons an hour before Dr. Brenham
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and myself, with one of the Texan officers, had determined upon sounding some of our guard as to whether they would pass us out in the night for a liberal sum of money. Young Sully, one of the Texans who spoke Spanish, was also let into the secret, and would have ventured with us had the attempt been made. Sully was the interpreter of the prisoners, and from constant communication with the guard knew every officer and soldier belonging to it. He had frequently hinted the subject of an escape to some of them, and from their answers felt confident that one hundred dollars would open every door in the Convent of Santiago. Having thus made up our minds to escape, we all awaited, with not a little impatience, a favourable opportunity to carry some one of our plans into effect.

At eight o'clock in the morning the Mexican having charge of the prisoners who worked in the streets made his appearance, with orders for them to be in readiness. I had expected that Santa Anna would impose street duty upon me also, and compel me to work it out; but in this I was agreeably disappointed.

It was really amusing to see the Texans setting out for their morning's work. The orders from headquarters were, that all should be sent into the streets; but it was easy enough to avoid it by feigning sickness. The larger portion preferred the fresh air and exercise outside the walls to the confinement and closeness within, going to their labour with joyous laughs which contrasted strangely with the clanking of their chains. The latter they cared little for. Their limbs were fettered, but their minds were free; and a moment's reflection taught them, however much they might have been annoyed at first, that they had committed no act which as men they could be ashamed of, and consequently their chains

were no disgrace. As to the work they did, it was all a mere farce: there was not one of them but could have performed the labour of a day in fifteen minutes by using mere ordinary exertion.

CHAPTER XV.

Fare of the Texans in Santiago.—Their Companions at Puebla not as well treated.—The Latter compelled to work and associate with Mexican Mal-factors.—Anecdote of the Old Commandante of Santiago.—The Texans achieve a decided Victory over their Oppressor.—The Puebla Prisoners at their Tricks.—Attending Mass in Chains.—Mad Pranks of the Texans in Church.—Additional Ceremonies ingrafted upon the Catholic Ritual.—The Reader taken back to Santiago.—Foreign Visitors.—Farther Thoughts of escaping.—Action of General Thompson in my Behalf.—The Foreign Policy of the United States—Its Weakness and Inefficiency.—Santa Anna "Laughing in his Sleeve."—Plan to bribe our Guard at Santiago.—Evening Amusements of the Prisoners.—Major Bennett and his Bible.—Agreeable Soirées.—Character of the Anglo-Saxon Race under Misfortune.—Anticipation worse than Reality.—The Texans taken to their Morning Work.—Reasons for Slighting the Author.—More Visitors at Santiago.—Advised to defer an Escape.—Preparations for celebrating the Anniversary of the Battle of San Jacinto.—The Texans at their Work.—Experiments as to the smallest possible Amount of Labour a Man can perform when he exerts himself.—The Mexicans Outwitted.—Decorations of our Room.—San Jacinto and Patriotism.—The Texans at their Celebration.—Close of the Anniversary.

THE prisoners in the Convent of Santiago were comparatively well fed—far better than were their unfortunate comrades at either Puebla or Peroté, as I afterward ascertained. At Santiago, a pint of very good coffee was given to each man in the morning, with a dish of well-cooked frijoles and as much bread as he wanted. The latter was white, sweet, and brought to us fresh, the Mexicans being famous for the rare quality of their bread. For dinner, which was cooked by some