

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

of our own men, we had beef, rice, and vegetables, the former of inferior quality, as the cattle in the vicinity of Mexico are seldom fat. There was an abundance of everything, however, and seldom are prisoners of war better treated, as far as regards eating, than were the Texans at the city of Mexico.

At Puebla the case was said to be widely different, a niggardly economy prevailing in the *commissariat*. As regards clothing, too, the prisoners at Santiago were infinitely better provided for than their comrades at Puebla, for while the former were neatly and comfortably clad—I believe by the chief magistrate of the city of Mexico—the latter received little raiment other than that supplied to them by foreigners. They were confined, too, at the Presidio, in the same patio or courtyard with two or three hundred of the vilest malefactors, and at first were even chained to them—a Mexican and Texan at either end of a long and heavy chain: but from some cause they were afterward separated, and the Texans confined together by the same fetters. The Puebla prisoners were also sent into the streets under most oppressive taskmasters, and, in company with the lowest Mexican felons and malefactors, compelled to clean the streets, gutters, and filthy sewers of the city, besides undergoing other trials even more degrading.

Not so at Santiago. The old commandante, one morning, ordered the Texans to perform some debasing work, which they at once and peremptorily refused to engage in. A second time they were commanded to the task, but still they persisted in the stand they had taken. Driven almost to madness, the ill-natured officer next ordered such of them as refused the disgracing labour to step a few paces forward, at the same time

muttering dark threats against such as should venture from the ranks. To his utter dismay, every man boldly stepped forward, determined to be shot at once rather than obey his orders. The old commandante fumed, fretted, and swore, and threatened to send an account of their refractory conduct to Santa Anna himself, but all to no purpose—the Texans were united and determined in the stand they had taken. This was the last time they were called upon to perform any vile office. The commandante really sent a report of the transaction to the functionary who was at that time the principal magistrate or mayor of the city; but the prisoners forwarded another account of it to the same personage, in which they declared their willingness to labour, but boldly added that they would be coerced to no debasing work. The magistrate, whose name I have forgotten, but whom all the prisoners must recollect as a gentlemanly and liberal man, admitted the justice of their conduct, and gave orders that they should never be called upon to perform such offices as the commandante had endeavoured to exact from them. Here was a decided victory gained over their oppressor, and the Texans improved it in such a way that the old and ill-natured fellow was sorry he had ever crossed them.

One would suppose the indignities and hardships heaped upon the prisoners at Puebla would break their spirits; but such was not the case—nothing could subdue their natural buoyancy of disposition. Many and amusing were the stories related of the fun and frolic they were continually “getting up” among themselves, and the tricks and jokes they perpetrated whenever an opportunity occurred. The wags who were instrumental in convening the mirthful courts at San Cristo-

bal were still among them, ever ready to extract laughter let what would happen. One anecdote I will relate—a story which is entirely too good to be lost.

Every Sunday morning, the prisoners confined at Puebla were compelled to attend mass, in chains, at one of the churches. The floors of all the religious establishments of note in Mexico are of stone or marble, without seats of any kind, and those in attendance must either kneel or stand during the ceremonies. In the present instance, the Texans were paraded in rows before the altar, and compelled to fall upon their knees while mass was said; but they were not obliged to go through all the little forms and ceremonies which the Catholic Church in Mexico exacts of its votaries, such as crossing themselves, smiting their breasts, and other outward observances. Well drilled, however, were they in all the minutæ of these demonstrations, and in addition one of the jokers, who had acted as the prosecuting attorney at San Cristobal, and who was a great mimic, taught them a few original "extras" and "fancy touches," which he had ingrafted upon the regular Catholic ceremonials. So well had he disciplined his brother prisoners, that they could go through all his ritual with as much promptness and precision as could the best military company in existence go through its simplest manœuvres.

On arriving at the church, and after kneeling in front of the altar, the well-drilled Texans awaited the usual signal from the officiating priest to commence. There probably was not a Catholic among them; yet the assumed air of grave devotion to be seen in their faces would have done credit to the most rigid of that creed. At the given signal, and at the proper time, the chained prisoners would cross themselves with all seeming hu-

mility, closely imitating every motion of the priest and of the Mexicans around them; but instead of stopping with their Catholic neighbours, they wound up by placing the right thumb to the tip of their noses, and then, with a mock gravity which might have drawn a smile from an Egyptian mummy, circled the fingers about, and all this directly in the face of the officiating priest, and without a smile upon their countenances. When the proper time came for again crossing themselves, the mischievous leader of the Texans would pass the word for his men to "come the double compound action," as he called it. This resembled the first movement, with the exception that it was more complicated and more mysterious to the surrounding Mexicans. After the right hand had gone its usual round, from forehead to breast and from shoulder to shoulder, the thumb again settled on the tip of the nose; but this time the left thumb was joined to the little finger of the right hand, and then commenced a series of fancy gyrations with all the fingers, the like of which was probably never before seen in a Catholic church. Sam Weller, I believe, or if not he, some modern philosopher of his school, defines the movement I have just described as meaning something like "This may be all very true, but we don't believe a word of it." What the Mexicans thought of it, or whether they noticed it or not, I am unable to say: it may be that they considered it as simply "a way" the Texans had, and thought no more of it. Such is the story told of the pranks played by the prisoners confined in Puebla.

During the first day of my imprisonment at Santiago we were visited by numbers of foreigners, all manifesting not a little astonishment at seeing me there, and in irons. They had not even heard of my being removed

from San Lazaro, and promised to inform Mr. Ellis and General Thompson of the circumstance as soon as they returned to the city. I told them, one and all, that I would not remain in the place a week, let the risk be what it might, and even requested one of them to smuggle me in a monk's habit, that I might have everything in readiness should a favourable opportunity occur of escaping in that disguise through the garden. Our friends left after a short visit, and the rest of the day I passed in dragging my chain over the stone floor, and in waiting, with not a little impatience, the return of Sully, who was in the street, with the men. I was anxious to know his success in tampering with the guard.

Among the Americans who visited us during the forenoon was Mr. Perrin. On returning to the city, he at once communicated the fact of my being in Santiago, and in irons, to General Thompson. The latter had not yet been duly received as the accredited minister of the United States, but he promptly interested himself in my behalf by calling immediately at the residence of Mr. Ellis and informing him of the facts, expressing not a little astonishment and indignation at the strange and uncalled-for conduct of the Mexican government. Here I will give an extract from General Thompson's official letter to Mr. Webster, narrating the circumstance of his visit to Mr. Ellis, which I find published in the *Madisonian* of the 30th of June, 1842 :

"On my arrival in Mexico I was informed, and afterward learned from Mr. Ellis, that on the 14th of April, two days before my arrival in this city, and when I was hourly expected, he had an interview with the President, Santa Anna, and had been promised the release of the American prisoners. Mr. Ellis told me, at the same time, he had no hope of the fulfilment of this

promise. It was natural that Mr. Ellis should desire these prisoners to be released to him, and not to me ; and as I thought the Mexican authorities would prefer that the matter should take this course, I was disposed to aid Mr. Ellis in his negotiations by every means in my power—the liberation of the prisoners being the primary object. On Tuesday, the 19th, I was not a little surprised to learn that Mr. Kendall had been removed from the hospital of San Lazaro to the Convent of Santiago, and for the first time put in chains. I immediately went to the office of Mr. Ellis, and proposed that he should write a note to the Minister of Foreign Relations, or that we should address to him a joint note on the subject. He declined doing so, saying that he had seen the minister the day before, and that he did not think any good would result. I told him I thought the subsequent placing of Mr. Kendall in irons justified and demanded it, and immediately addressed to M. de Bocanegra the note No. 5."

I will also give extracts from General Thompson's letter to M. de Bocanegra, referred to at the close of the passage just quoted. M. de B., it should be remembered, was at that time the Mexican Minister of Foreign Relations. This letter, I believe, was written at the room of Mr. Ellis, and was despatched immediately to M. de Bocanegra. It is dated "Mexico, April 19, 1842," bears the signature of General Thompson alone, and appeared originally in the same number of the *Madisonian* :

"The undersigned had the honour, on yesterday, to address a note to your excellency, announcing the fact of his appointment as minister of the United States of America, near this government, and of his arrival in this city, and requesting to know when he could have the

honour of being presented to the most excellent the Provisional President of Mexico. Not having received an answer to that note (of which he by no means complains), the undersigned as yet bears no official relation to this government. But having this moment been informed that a citizen of the United States, Mr. George W. Kendall, who has been confined in the hospital of San Lazaro, has been removed to the Convent of Santiago, and placed in chains, the undersigned hopes it will be his sufficient apology for his again addressing your excellency.

"The undersigned is in possession of testimony additional to that heretofore submitted to your excellency, which he believes will place beyond all doubt the facts of Mr. Kendall having had a passport, and that his purposes in his visit to Mexico were altogether pacific. The undersigned, relying (as he does) on the sincerity of the professions heretofore made to his excellency, Mr. Ellis, has no hesitation in saying that the Mexican authorities will be satisfied with this evidence, and will take pleasure in releasing Mr. Kendall."

These extracts I have copied, partly to show the effect my removal from San Lazaro to Santiago had upon my friends in Mexico, but principally to make known the deep interest taken in my behalf by General Thompson. Although at the time I had little hope of obtaining immediate liberty through the intervention of my own government, I still could not but feel grateful for the prompt and decided tone adopted by the new minister in an emergency to me so critical.

I could not, at the time, look upon the course pursued by Mr. Ellis as sufficiently energetic, yet even to this day I do not believe that a majority of our diplomatic agents would have acted differently. I am firmly con-

vinced that a bold tone would have been the proper one, and that the assumption of responsibility would have met with the approval of the people of the United States; but the chief blame must lie at the door of the government, not at the minister's. That Mr. Ellis did not succeed better, in his efforts to procure the liberty of his countrymen, must be ascribed, in the first place, to the circumstance that it has almost become a settled policy with our foreign plenipotentiaries—a policy he did not feel disposed to deviate from—to avoid taking a serious and decided responsibility, in cases of sudden emergency, fearful that the interests of the party which has sent them may be injured, or its plans for future advancement frustrated by so doing; and herein lies one of the most serious deficiencies of our system of government. The foreign agents of the United States have nominally the same powers that are granted to those of England or France; yet while the latter can act promptly, and with the full confidence that they will be justified and supported at home in whatever stand they may take, the hands of the former are too often tied by the fear that their course may possibly run counter to the interests of that party or clique whose servants they deem themselves, and hence, in matters of really trivial importance, they are driven to write home for advice how to act. In the second place, the instructions at first sent to Mr. Ellis were such as allowed him no other alternative than a "war of words" with the Mexican diplomatists—a game at which the latter leave the Anglo-Saxon race entirely in the distance. They resemble Goldsmith's country schoolmaster,

"For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still,"

and so can they. If my reader would allow me one moment's digression, I would give it as my firm convic-