

CHAPTER XXI.

The Cracovienne.—Large Body of Mexican Troops.—Their Inefficiency.—Speculations as to the Result of an Invasion of Mexico.—The *Vomito* at Vera Cruz.—Determination to remain at Jalapa.—The Scotchman we had left at Puebla arrives.—Work of the Robbers.—Indian Girls from the Tierra Caliente.—Picturesque and neat Style of Dressing their Hair.—A pleasant Ride.—Departure from Jalapa.—Description of the Litera.—Changing Teams.—Mexican Drivers.—Puente Nacional.—Night Ride through the Hot Country.—Residence of Santa Anna.—Fireflies.—Santa Fé.—Number of Dogs in the Vicinity.—Singular District.—The Gulf of Mexico in Sight.—Arrival at Vera Cruz.—A Conduca.—Sopilotes.—The Black Vomit again.—Arrival on board the Woodbury.—Commodore Marin.—Salutes.—Under Way.—Pleasant Passage.—The Balize in Sight.—Author's Leave of his Reader.

WE had no sooner alighted from the stage, stretched our stiffened limbs, and attended well to the safety of our baggage, than the enlivening notes of the *Cracovienne*, played by a large and well-organized military band, reached our ears from without. On going to the front doors and balconies of the hotel, we ascertained that there was a full parade of all the regular troops then stationed at Jalapa, several thousands in number, and for half an hour we watched the solid platoons as they marched past. A majority of the men, although they were now cleaned up and had uniforms upon their backs, were doubtless ragged and wretched convicts but a few months before, and driven to the capital tied in strings. Such men, destitute alike of moral principle, pride, and that love of country which is a main requisite, can never be manufactured into effective soldiers under any discipline; but when to their natural deficiencies is added the fact that the majority of their

officers are taken from the higher classes and placed at once at the heads of companies and regiments, without either theoretical or practical knowledge of arms, little need be expected from a force thus constituted. In case of a foreign invasion, such a force could be crushed at once by one fourth the number of well-disciplined troops; but the invading army would encounter other difficulties than the meeting with such defenders. It is much easier to *say* that ten thousand well-appointed Americans or Englishmen can march from the seacoast directly to the city of Mexico than to *do* it. The ordinary troops of the country would offer but few obstacles, would be little in the way could they be brought to battle in the open field; the strong natural barriers against invasion in the shape of mountain fastnesses, a better class of troops to be met in the vicinity of the capital, the opposition of the hardy rancheros who would at once be drawn into the contest, combined with a religious phrensy which would doubtless be created and kept up by the priests—all these obstacles must be encountered on the road to Mexico. I do not say that they could not be surmounted—far from it—I only wish to offer the opinion that something more than mere holyday work might be expected by those who should set out on such an undertaking. Of the troops we saw that morning at Jalapa a large portion have since perished—some at Vera Cruz, but the greater number in Yucatan, where they were either cut off in the vain attempt of Santa Anna to subdue his refractory subjects during the years '42 and '43, or by the malaria and dreaded sickness of that unhealthy climate.

On arriving at Jalapa, Judge Ellis found letters awaiting him which gave the information that the *vomito*, or

yellow fever, had broken out on board the cutter Woodbury, the vessel in which we were to sail for New-Orleans, and which was then lying under the Castle of San Juan de Ulua at Vera Cruz. One or two of the officers, besides several of the men, were down with the disease, and as it was deemed imprudent to sail with it on board, Judge E. was advised to remain at Jalapa until farther intelligence should be sent him. Several of the passengers determined upon proceeding at once to Vera Cruz, regardless of the fever; but the larger number remained behind, and took lodgings which the ex-minister procured for us at the hotel of an American.

On the arrival of the next stage from Puebla, we crowded around it to note the passengers and gather any intelligence that might be brought. There were but five travellers, three or four of them Mexican officers, and our Scotch friend for whom we could not make room the morning we left the "City of the Angels." His face wore a lugubriously comic expression as he alighted from the diligence, while his vestments gave token of a change of wardrobe other than the difference of climate called for. Instead of the substantial blue cloth coat, of goodly dimensions and excellent preservation, which had graced his upper man when we left him standing by his trunk, his arms and shoulders were now tightly encased within a yellow Nankin short jacket, a world too small, while his head was partially covered by a queer hat much the worse for wear. He recognised us immediately, and with a face half-sorrowful, half-upbraiding, exclaimed, "You see me," at the same time turning himself round so that we could be brought to a full realization of his unfortunate plight. "I told you so," he continued, "I knew it—I said so at first. Talk about Scotch mists—I came near perishing

this morning on the mountains—greatcoat and all are gone." Not one word did he say about robbers; yet his broken sentences and forlorn appearance told plainly enough that he had fallen into the hands of highwaymen. After a little, he related the particulars of his having been robbed a few miles from Puebla. The brigands had an easy task, as save himself there was no foreigner in the coach. The passengers, one and all, were compelled to lie down with their faces to the earth, were stripped of everything valuable in the shape of money and clothing, and then allowed to proceed. In telling his story, the Scotchman mixed up with his discourse hearty and abundant curses against the Mexicans in general and the ladrones in particular, concluding with the remark that if he was once more fortunate enough to see his own native hills he would not be caught in outlandish parts again; but the most amusing feature of it was, the pride he appeared to take in his powers of divination—in the fact of his having told us, at Puebla, that he should be robbed, and the event turning out precisely as he had anticipated.

We passed some week or ten days at Jalapa, and pleasantly, too; for nothing can exceed the balminess and spring-like beauties of its climate, the exceeding richness of its endless variety of fruits, the delicious fragrance of its atmosphere, which is loaded with the perfume of innumerable flowers, or the picturesque views and romantic rides which abound in its vicinity. Pineapples, gathered from the stem ripe and of most luscious flavour, can be purchased for a trifle, and in this pure climate eaten without fear of consequences. Chirimoyas here arrive at their full perfection, bananas, such as I have never seen elsewhere, grow in most lavish profusion, while all the fruits of the tropics appear to be

found in abundance. Often did I watch a party of Indian girls from the tierra caliente below, sitting upon the sidewalk opposite the Casa de Diligencias, selling, for a few coppers, plums of rare and delicious quality. Their loose dress seemed peculiarly adapted to the climate, and would of itself attract not a little attention from the foreigner; but their rich, bright olive complexions, their dark, mild eyes, and luxuriant hair, of glossy blackness and reaching nearly to the ground, formed their principal attractions. Upon their hair they bestow all their care and attention, and justly are they proud of it. Their mode of dressing this ornamental appendage is peculiarly their own. Two long braids, reaching nearly to the ground, fall from the back of the head, while two other braids, after circling the head twice, are fastened in front, with a rose or some other flower confined at the point where the ends meet. These braids are composed of two strands of hair and one of red cord or riband, neatly platted, lending an additional beauty to their otherwise picturesque appearance. Their dress is simple enough, consisting of a petticoat of some woollen stuff, without an under garment of any description; but in place of the latter they wear an oblong piece of cotton or linen cloth, elaborately ornamented, in many cases, with needlework, over their shoulders as a protection from the sun. Directly in the centre a hole is cut, large enough to admit the head—thus is this singular garment worn, and it certainly has a cool and comfortable appearance in a warm climate, if nothing more.

We were told that the girls lived at a village several leagues below Jalapa, a romantic situation upon the borders of a clear and swift stream, in which they bathe and wash their hair twice a day. The males are de-

scribed as lazy, worthless, drunken fellows, living entirely upon the industry of the women; but the latter are invariably cleanly, frugal, laborious, and, singular enough for this country, virtuous. We intended paying their village a visit before we came away, for we heard many stories of its surpassing beauty of location; but some circumstance which I have now forgotten prevented us. A party of us, however, had a pleasant ride to another Indian town several leagues below Jalapa. It was during this excursion that I for the first time saw the coffee plant, the pineapple, the vanilla bean, and other products of the tropics, under cultivation, as also the weed from which the nauseous jalap, that medicine which has given this place a name, is extracted. The view of the city from several points below, as it stands boldly out on the mountain side at an elevation of more than four thousand feet above the level of the sea, is peculiarly picturesque. The towering Cofre de Peroté, rising high in air, affords a majestic background to the view, while still higher, and with its snow-capped summit apparently reaching the blue vault of heaven itself, the traveller catches an occasional view of Orizava as some opening in the trees allows the eye full scope to the southward.

On the 8th of May, after passing, as I have already mentioned, several days very pleasantly at Jalapa, Judge Ellis received intelligence from Vera Cruz that the vomito had left the Woodbury, and that everything was in readiness for her instant departure. The following day, therefore, saw us once more in the diligence and on our road homeward. While at Jalapa, I had several times noticed the arrival and departure of the *literas*, and had intended to take a seat, or rather a couch, in one of these easy vehicles; but as my passage had been paid

in the diligence, and as the latter ran through in less time, I was compelled to give up all thought of being thus transported. The litera is a box some six or seven feet long by about four in width, with a top and covering somewhat resembling that of a common Jersey wagon. Within is a mattress of sufficient width to accommodate two passengers, with pillows and other comforts. The box is placed upon two long shafts or poles, which are lifted from the ground and securely fastened to the saddles of a pair of mules, one at either end of the litera. When everything is in readiness, the passenger has nothing to do but climb into his quarters, where he can sit, lie, sleep, read, or smoke, as may best please him. I certainly envied a gentleman whom I saw one morning, half lying upon his back in an easy posture, with a book in his hand and a cigar in his mouth. He seemed the very personification of comfort.

As we rattled through the principal street of Jalapa, and crossed a little stream, which dashes through the city, the eyes of all, but more particularly those of a group of washing-girls,* were drawn towards us; for the top and sides of the stage were ornamented with bird-cages, flower-pots, plants of different descriptions, fruits, of which we had laid in or on a goodly store, besides many usefals and ornamentals which had been picked up and collected by the different members of our party. One gentleman in particular, of much taste in such matters, had purchased an assortment of tropical birds and plants, so that when we were in motion the diligence bore close resemblance to a travelling

* There are one or two establishments in Jalapa devoted entirely to the washing of clothes, at which numerous girls can be seen at all times working under the shelter of a roof, but in a building which has no sides. So white, and with such care do these girls get up linen, that it was told us they received custom even from Vera Cruz.

aviary set in the midst of a floating botanical garden. No wonder, then, that we attracted more than usual attention.

In half an hour we left the outskirts of the city—a city so celebrated for its delightful climate, its delicious fruits, and its pretty women—and began gradually to descend the mountains towards the tierra caliente. At the first place where we changed teams we met the stage from Vera Cruz. Among the passengers was Mr. Dorsey, just arrived from the United States with despatches for General Thompson, and on his way to the city of Mexico. Instead of one Yankee we now had two Mexican drivers for the diligence—instead of horses, the animals attached were a set of tolerably well-behaved mules. One of the drivers acted as postillion, riding upon a mule in the lead; the other sat upon the box, and appeared to have his hands full in so managing the wheel mules as to prevent an upset. The road, in many places, is extremely rough and uneven, and that we should meet with some serious accident appeared inevitable; but darkness came and we were yet safe, and as it was now impossible to see the dangers which beset our path, we gradually became more reconciled. In this way we passed Encero, Plan del Rio, with other small hamlets the names of which, if they have any, are forgotten. I recollect the crossing of the heavy bridge called, since the revolution, Puente Nacional, and of seeing the large village near it.* At a fonda by the roadside we obtained a very fair supper, and saw a very pretty girl—the circumstance that the chairs, which the

* Several of the Texan prisoners, who were released by Santa Anna in the June following, died of yellow fever, and were buried near this bridge. Among them were Doctor Whittaker and Lieutenant Seavy. Captain Holiday died of the same disease on his passage from Vera Cruz to Galveston

Mexican landlord had provided for the accommodation of his foreign customers, were so low that to sit in them while eating was extremely tiresome, is another souvenir I brought from this place.

We were now directly in the heart of the tierra caliente—amid the rank vegetation, the deadly malaria, the suffocating heat of the hot, tropical climates. Innumerable fireflies or bugs, of large size, and shedding a pale but brilliant light, were flitting about in the bushes by the roadside, and illuminating the dense masses of creeping vines with which the forests of the warm countries abound. At midnight, or a little after, we were travelling through the immense estate of Santa Anna, Manga de Clavo I think it is called. To this place he has always retired after his reverses, and here, it is said, all his plans for his own political advancement have been formed. About three o'clock in the morning we reached the village of Santa Fé, and while the driver was changing his animals we awakened two or three families in the hope of obtaining chocolate or some other refreshment. Nothing could we procure save a bottle of bad claret, and a draught of Catalan brandy which was worse. It is impossible to form an opinion, with anything like certainty, of the number of dogs that enjoyed the pleasure of barking at us during the ten minutes we passed at Santa Fé; but a rough calculation would set down at least ten to every door, and five to every yard.

As the sun rose, we were ploughing our way through a dreary region of deep sand, the land on either side of the road overrun with weeds and bushes of rankest growth. Flocks of screaming parrots and macaws were flying lazily over head, while birds of red, green, and richly-variegated plumage were crossing the road

and fluttering among the bushes in every direction. After passing the rude huts of several negro families, who must here gain but a scanty subsistence, we at length emerged from this strange sandy region. A single turn of the road, and we were directly upon the beach of the Gulf of Mexico—we had left the hot and pestilential air of the sultry lands, and were inhaling the pure breeze from the ocean. Thus in one night had we passed entirely through the tierra caliente, and almost without seeing it. To be sure, we had beheld the rude bamboo or cane huts of the inhabitants, hardly one degree removed from the wigwam of the wildest Indian;* we had inhaled the indolent breezes which come loaded with the perfume of endless varieties of flowers; we had seen myriads of bright fireflies in all their midnight splendour—but we had not seen all that we had hoped to see in a region which, to use an Irish expression, is running over with parrots, bananas, pineapples, monkeys, and other tropical fruits.

* This may not be a fitting place, but it may be here mentioned that since the earlier part of this work was stereotyped the author has had several conversations with Mr. Gregg in relation to the Waco Indians, in which that gentleman has expressed his decided conviction that the pretended Wacoos were no other than a band of Cherokees, driven either from the main tribe in the United States for some misdemeanor, or a part of the band defeated in Eastern Texas at the time when the noted chief Bowles was killed. From the great knowledge Mr. G. has of the Southwestern Indians, the author is satisfied that he is correct. He describes the Wacoos, among whom he has travelled, as not being so far advanced in civilization as to warrant the belief that they are now living in the comfortable quarters described in the account of the village seen by the Santa Fé pioneers. The fact that they said they were Wacoos is no evidence, as lying is a prominent trait with all Indians. I might also add, in this note, that the name "Salezar" has not been rightly given in the earlier part of the narrative. Anxious to do that worthy all justice, I would here state that the true orthography is *Damasio Salazar*. He shall not say that I have robbed him of any fame by spelling his name wrong.

Mr. Gregg is shortly to publish a work upon the prairies and the Northern Mexican settlements, which, from his great experience and information, must throw a flood of light upon one of the dark corners of the earth.

From the point where we first struck the low, sandy beach, although it must have been five miles distant, we could plainly see the churches, houses, and even the walls which environ Vera Cruz. The drive along the water's edge was slow and tedious, for the wheels of the diligence sank deep, and the sun, although but an hour risen from his cool bed in the gulf, was pouring down a flood of such heat as is only to be felt upon this unprotected sandy shore. While yet a mile intervened between us and the city, we could see innumerable *sopilotes*, or Mexican buzzards, standing moodily and solemnly upon the walls, housetops, and different towers and steeples, their eyes turned watchfully downward, on the look-out for their accustomed food. They are the scavengers of the city, and are never molested. On reaching the gate, around which a crowd of soldiers were lounging, a short detention sufficed with the officer stationed there to grant us permission to enter. A large *conducta*, or escort guarding nearly a million of dollars in silver, was entering the city at the same time. A drive of some fifteen minutes, through the wide and well-built streets, brought us to the principal hotel of the place, where we were soon safely housed.

We were not long in learning that the much-dreaded black vomit was still raging in the city, although it had left the Woodbury. The stranger, as he looks through the comparatively clean and airy thoroughfares of Vera Cruz, and sees the wide waters of the Gulf of Mexico lying directly before him, is at a loss to account for the sickness which yearly carries to the grave its hundreds of victims. The low and damp region, through a part of which we had passed in the morning, is the section whence come the noxious miasmas that generate the vomito. The friends who had preceded us from Jala-

pa were fortunately all well when we reached Vera Cruz, although some of them had suffered from the effects of the climate.

Our stay in the infected city was short, the next morning seeing us all on board the cutter; but I cannot take my leave of Vera Cruz without expressing my warmest thanks to Mr. Hargous, the then acting American consul, as well as to the countrymen I met at his residence, for the many acts of kindness and attention I received at their hands. The liberality of the Americans of this place, as hundreds of my unfortunate comrades can testify, was ever active in alleviating their wants and sorrows.

Previous to the sailing of the Woodbury, a salute was fired by her commander, Captain Nones, in honour of Judge Ellis and of Mr. Hargous, as well as of the then chief of the Mexican navy, Commodore Marin, who was on board at the time. The salute was answered from the barque Ann Louisa, an American packet then in port under command of Captain Clifford. After Commodore Marin had left the Woodbury and reached his own vessel, the Libertad, another salute was fired by him, which was duly returned by the cutter. These ceremonies over, we got under way with a fair breeze, and before nightfall nothing could be seen of the low coast upon which stands the once rich and populous city of Vera Cruz, or the True Cross, or of the frowning Castle of San Juan de Ulua, which commands the harbour—the towering peak of Orizava, rising far in the distance, was the only point of Mexico visible.

It was on the 12th of May that the cutter Woodbury sailed from La Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, as the Spaniards were wont to call this city in the proud days of her prosperity. To the commander of our vessel,

Captain Nones, as well as to Lieutenants Peters, Wilson, and Faunce, we were all under great obligations, and I cannot let the opportunity pass without an expression of thanks for their kindness. On the morning of the 18th of May, exactly one year from the date when I left it so full of expectation of a pleasant four months' excursion, the low coast which surrounds the mouths of the mighty Mississippi appeared in sight—we had reached the Balize.

And here, after begging pardon of my reader for sending him ashore at a point so desolate and dreary, I must take my leave. For one year we have journeyed together through scenes of varied nature. If his random recollections of travel have served to beguile an idle hour, to interest and amuse the reader who has accompanied him, the knowledge of it will more than compensate the author for his many dark days of privation and suffering upon the prairies, and the months of captivity he shared with his companions in Mexico.

THE END.

