

### CHAPTER XXX.

EARLY in the month of May, the Ohio, 74, arrived at Mazatlan. On the 8th, I was ordered to prepare for a journey to the city of Mexico—my preparations were made in five minutes; merely a saddle, sabre, spurs, pistols, undress jacket, riding trowsers and serapa. The same night I rode to the Presidio, where General Anaya politely furnished me with a special passport, and afforded every facility to expedite the journey through his immediate command. Returning to the port at daylight, a letter of credit awaited me, which, with a dispatch enclosed in oiled silk and concealed in the lining of my jacket, completed my arrangements. A ship of war had been ordered to land me at San Blas, a port some one hundred and thirty miles down the coast, and considered the nearest practicable route to Mexico. I was to be accompanied by a Mexican officer, a dark pop-eyed little man, of a quiet and gentlemanly demeanor, who was bound on a mission to his own government, and took passage with us in the frigate.

Attended by light flyaway airs and calms, we were nearly three days in accomplishing the short distance of the voyage, and it was not until nightfall of the 13th, that the good ship lay becalmed a few miles from the shore. With my fellow traveller, I was tossed into a boat, and after a smart pull of two hours, we were safely landed up a narrow estero, on the banks of which was

placed the little town of San Blas, apparently overstocked with musquitos. A letter to a Chinaman, named Passio, made him yell for his servants; before midnight had struck, after embracing a number of officers from two of our ships at anchor there, we went pacing away through the thick foliage, answering to the echo the loud shouts of the friends left behind—it was thus began my rough notes and jolts on a Mexican saddle. We were accompanied by a guide, and a pack-mule for my companion's portmanteau. My wardrobe did not require one—consisting of two shirts and a tooth-brush.

The horse I bestrode was not very beautiful to behold, certainly—being what is technically termed in animal structure—a singed cat; but nevertheless he rattled along bravely, without a jolt, plunge, or stumble, and we got on famously together. We contrived to while away miles and hours, coursing along the *marismas* of the sea, with a clear bright moon to light us; or winding through magnificent forests of sycamore and pine, beneath dense thickets, arched with vines, cactus and acacia;—grouped here and there with palmettos, or cocoanuts, crackling in the breeze—and looking for all the world like long-legged trowserless turbaned Turks. The scene was quite exhilarating, and even my comrade allowed his huge moustache to be parted; but whether owing to the pure air, and excitement of the ride, or the yet purer brandy from his *alforgas*, his hitherto taciturn tongue was let loose, and we became bosom friends on the spot. He had put sufficient in his mouth to steel away his brains, and not a little to my surprise—though I expressed none—he shortly proposed to me a capital plan of cheating the government: that by keeping together—he being empowered to take horses for nothing—we might charge the full amount, and halve the proceeds. I readily



assented, sealed the bargain by a squeeze that nearly wrenched him from the saddle, and resolved to cut his fascinating society at the first convenient opportunity. This gentleman bore the reputation of being one out of a few honest officers in the Mexican army. However, it is but justice to state that these little sins of commission are not regarded in so serious a light as with us; although I could not help speculating on the beautiful moral attributes possessed by the remainder of the army. They have a very trite saying, which hits their case precisely: *Primero jo, pues mi padre*—me first, then daddy.

At about three o'clock we had left the grounds bordering upon the ocean, for the first step to the temperate terrace. Alighting at a large rancho, we unceremoniously aroused some sleeping figures—had a mess of scrambled eggs—thence to horse again. We soon gained the highland, by bridle-paths skirting along crests of hills and ravines, until daylight found us ambling from one to the other, in an everlasting up-and-down route, both tiresome and monotonous. Eight leagues of this work brought us to the more elevated region of the plateau—a more open country, with now and then a rancho—cultivated fields—broader roads, and all the signs of approaching a large town; then in a moment the view opened upon a broad, lovely plain, framed in by three noble swells of sierras, and before us lay long lines of buildings and gardens, with a thin stream winding down the slopes, like a white thread—and this was Tepic. Leaving my compañero at a meson, I swung myself from the saddle, after a twenty-eight leagues ride, within the spacious *patio* of an American gentleman's house, to whom I was regularly endorsed—Mr. Bissell. He received me in the kindest manner possible—washed, shaved and breakfasted me, and put all in train for a renewed start by night. We called on the Com-

mandante Aristi, who declared the inexpressible pleasure he experienced at the sight of me, signed my passport, and bowed us most politely out of the house, even to the furthest door-step. This state visit over, I took a sound nap, and was aroused in season for a bath. We rode to the green suburbs of the town, where were nice thatched sheds stretching half way over a rapid stream. After a refreshing swim, and a sip of lemonade filled with caraway-seeds, we returned to dine on delightful brook trout, and pleasant vinous accompaniments. The horses were again equipped, and making a tour of the city, we stopped at the cotton mills belonging to the wealthy English house of Barron, Forbes & Co. The *Fabrica* stands at the base of a steep hillside—composed of large white buildings, encircled by high walls on three sides, and the fourth facing an impetuous torrent, from which a strong body of water is diverted to drive the machinery. The banks were handsomely walled up, and laid out in parterres, prettily planted with shrubbery, all bearing the impress of great care and beauty. Further down the stream was an extensive garden, with broad alleys, arbors and spacious tanks, teeming with fruits, flowers and exotics of the rarest kinds.

The senior owner of the manufactory, Mr. Forbes, did the honor to play cicerone, and take me over the works. There were about five thousand spindles in operation; then working day and night. The machinery was a beautiful specimen of American ingenuity; nearly all the overseers, and the intelligent superintendent, Mr. Whiting, boasted of the same origin. None but coarser fabrics, suitable for the Mexican market, were milled; but the profits were enormous, having netted the previous year a fraction less than two hundred thousand dollars. The



operatives were all natives; and although, I was told, without the wish or energy to rise, still they did very well in the work required.

I never saw out of Europe or the United States, or Continental America, or in even the British Colonies, such extensive improvements keeping so close a wake to the rushing march of the age; all, however, begun and matured by the indomitable skill and enterprise of the intelligent owners.

I left Tepic two hours before midnight, and made all sail under a heavy press of spurs and stirrups. I said adios to the *Capitan*, who assured me his frame was deplorably jolted, and that he felt unable to proceed. The fact was, the Don carried too much weight for anything beyond a quarter stretch. I was recompensed for the loss of his society by the attendance of two dark *mozos* as guides, and three spare horses; but with the beasts I must confess having been decidedly duped: I booked them to Guadalajara, but they were neither swift nor well gaited. My attendants expressed great regret, as a matter of course, which did not prevent the avalanche of blessings with which they were indulged. At sunrise we dismounted a minute, for coffee, at a small village, with an unpronounceable jaw-cracking Indian name. It was a very pretty spot, shrubby and treesy, with a noisy rivulet washing the door-steps of an old ruined chapel. A bare-footed damsel was quite attentive to my pencilling occupations, and with an inquisitive frown and nod, as much as to inquire—"What on earth is he about?"—handed me a little glazed pot of wheat-coffee; but being a courier of the grand route, and having no time to satisfy the muchachita's curiosity, I swallowed the beverage, threw her a peseta, and while she was hunting for the change, we were in the saddle and off. At ten of the clock we halted at the hamlet of Ocultilti, in front of a little mud-built

*fonda*, where, for a Mexican miracle, was laid a tolerably clean cloth upon a table. The road thus far had been hilly and rugged, and the last five miles a tedious clamber over a mountain-pass. My horses had given out, and I felt a strong inclination to shoot the lying guides for imposing on me; but the patrona of the inn sent every boy in the place scampering in search of fresh horses, while she busied herself at the fire getting a breakfast of everlasting *frijoles*. In reply to my anxiety for more beasts, she continually repeated—*Quien sabe! hay muchos! si Señor!*—in this part of Mexico the oft-repeated exclamation—Who knows! there are thousands! Presently appeared two ragged, filthy Indians. They approached each other, tipped their broad sombreros, at an angle like to the rings of Saturn. *Como está vd? Muy bueno! Me allegro, y la familia? Para servir vd!* They kept up this strain of compliment for ten minutes, neither letting go hands nor hats—until my patience becoming exhausted at such fatigeing politeness—I let the lash of my whip fall lovingly around their legs. "I say, my fine fellows, are there any horses to be had?" *Quein sabe! Señor, hay muchos!* they both replied in a breath; but nothing more satisfactory could I learn. The boys never came back! the mistress became less civil after getting paid for her breakfasts; and after vainly waiting an hour, I felt convinced there was not a four-legged brute in the hamlet, or that the two-legged ones were too lazy to find them. Selecting the best of our spavined jades, we stumped slowly on, and a league beyond came to a post-house; here a good-natured dame, in the absence of her helpmate, mounted a mule, and soon drove up a cavallada. Transferring the saddles to better beasts, and followed by a diminutive elf, to bring them back, we continued our journey. The roads became smoother, and less broken; the country pre-



sented a more smiling aspect: green fields of grain, and cultivated plantations of the argave, covered the sides of hills and valleys. Pursuing a course through a well-watered district, without any evidences visible of volcanic origin, our road was suddenly closed by a very curious lava formation—an elevation not in the highest parts more than eighty feet—springing strangely and abruptly from the table land of the vale. There were acres upon acres of black volcanic masses thrown up into the most fantastic shapes; there were churches and altars, castles and coaches, figures of men and monkeys—with clusters of straight, slender cactus, in full flower, shooting far above all—rearing their white and red torch-like heads, as if to light up the black congregation below; which from a distance struck me as bearing a miniature resemblance to the Giant's Causeway. We passed this barrier, over a deep cut of slippery aqueous lava, when we again debouched into the *vega*, took a lave in a cool, clear torrent, and then came on at a great pace to the town of Aguacatlan.

From a hasty glance it appeared a nice place, and we drew up at a spacious meson, facing a pretty plaza, lined by magnificent rows of elms, with a handsome church in front. All looked gay withal: troops of vagabonds and girls were passing and repassing the portals. In a lofty hall of the Fonda, I had an excellent supper, washed down by a flask of capital bordeaux, which, the maestro informed me, had lain an unsaleable drug on his hands for eleven years. Passing from the sala to a shop in the building, I found a crowd of idlers, absorbing cigarillos and hearkening to the harangue of a stout fellow, shrouded in a seedy serapa: he was striving to awaken their patriotism by violently declaiming against the policy of the Mexican government, for tolerating an idea of peace, and lavishing a fair share of abuse upon the Yankees.

*Christo! Señores!* said he, "why didn't General Skote attack Piñon, where all was prepared for him, instead of creeping around the valley to Churubusco? Answer me that! *Porque Señores los Yankis son cobardes! todos! toditos!*"—Because every mother's son of the Americans were cowards. Upon the conclusion of this speech, he honored me with a close inspection, and apparently not being satisfied, touched his castor by way of formal introduction. "Capitan," he suggested, "you belong to the cavalry." I nodded. "Ay, he knew that by my *divisas*—shoulder-straps—but he mistook me at first for one of the San Patricios. Where was I bound?" I shrugged my shoulders. "Did I know Mazatlan?" I had been there. This last admission quite won his confidence; so, grasping me by the elbow, he drew me aside, and informed me that he was on a mission to that port for the purchase of arms to put in the hands of flaming red-hot patriots in Guadalajara; and that any intelligence to further his designs would be highly acceptable. I, of course, gave him all necessary information, and at the same time dropt a line by the post, which was the means of giving him an opportunity to inspect vacant apartments in the *carcel*, for some weeks after his arrival. Having no more time to waste, I left the good people to pump my *mozos*, whilst I took a short nap.

Before midnight, nerved by a cup of strong coffee, we mounted, and six leagues of rapid riding carried us to the post-house of Istlan. There was just light enough by the moon to reveal all the quiet beauty of the little town. The square was deserted; not a dog bayed; the noble trees with drooping branches reposed motionless in the air; not a sound was heard but the uneasy plashing of the sparkling fountain in the centre; and there was not a vestige of life, save a solitary twinkling taper that shone through the open



door of the post-house. Our shouts echoed back from the tall walls of the church on the opposite side of the plaza, and soon brought a gruff personage to the street. It was the *administrador* himself. He inquired, what *demonios* dared to raise such a din, when his venerable sire, Don Pancho, was stretched upon the bier, and masses to be said for his soul as soon as day dawned? I have ever remarked, that the safest mode of treating perverse, obstinate persons, who are resolved to quarrel, is to approach close to them, in a moral sense, and—like to dealing with a fierce ram by patting him on the tail—they have no space to rear and pitch into one. It is time enough to bid defiance when this system fails. Bowing to the saddle-bow, hat in hand, I thus began: "Pardon me, my good friend! had we known of your bereavement, be assured we should have torn our teeth out, rather than have disturbed your grief: we are bound *extraordinario*! If there be no horses, at least oblige us with a cup of water to wash down a measure of this oily *licor* from the grand Meson of Aguacatlan, and oblige us by touching it first to your own lips!" I saw by the moon's silver beams athwart his rubicund visage, that he relented; whereupon, paying him some sorrowful compliments upon the demise of his aged parent, I quite conquered his anger. Leaving me in charge of the defunct old gentleman, I puffed a cigarillo, while he went to get beasts for the guides, and his own mule for my use, as he assured me, *bueno y muy vivo*—lively as a cricket. In a few minutes we were again upon the road. Skirting along the banks of a small river for a couple of leagues, we then crossed to the opposite side, where hills arose in endless succession, soaring to the clouds in the distance, and where we were destined to pass. It was the *Plan de Barrancas*. I had for the past hour been venting

maledictions on the *administrador* and his *vivo* mule, for I never saw any but monks and muleteers who properly understand their peculiar management. To one, like myself, ignorant of the habits of these quadrupeds—never mind how expert a horseman he may be—if they ever be urged out of their usual amble on a level space, their gallop is such a jerking short pace, that the inexperienced rider will be kept alternately shifting his position from withers to rump, at every stride. But commend me to a good mule, over a broken country, where their delicate little hoofs find a secure foothold over shelving rocks, or upon the brink of a yawning precipice, where you drop the bridle, close your eyes and offer up an orison for your blessed mule to bear you safely. And with what sagacity they feel their way, and how often an imprudent rider will find cause to bless his stars that the wilful little beast takes the bit in the mouth, and obstinately pursues his own path! However, as I said before, they are not pleasant animals when the danger is passed; then they become at times unreasonably perverse, and persuasions, punchings, or spurrings, only serve to exhaust strength and temper, without any avail.

Our speed became necessarily slow, the country more and more barren, and the paths stony and uneven; still we passed from height to height, gradually ascending, until we came to the base of the great *Barrancas*. Here, much to my surprise, commenced a well-constructed military road, very broad, and coped in by a wall of loose stones, winding around the eastern brow of the *sierra*. In some places near the summit, I am confident, a dollar could be thrown four thousand feet before striking the base of the gorge that splits the great chain asunder. The view was bird-eyish, and



rather good—with the bright green dells below, in pretty contrast to the red basaltic rocks above—but limited by peaks of the surrounding heights. The road itself is a far more substantial work than the traveller is prepared to meet with in this part of Mexico, where everything relative to easy locomotion appears to have been left as nature and the mules will it. Still, but little reputation is lost in the way of consistency; for the moment the mountain is passed, the route again becomes little better than a sheep path. Although crossing this fine road caused me some astonishment; yet a little before, I was thrown into a stupor of amazement, to behold lying in the pathway a long iron thirty-two pounder gun, of the heaviest ship's calibre and weight! My *mozos* informed me, that this was the only one out of six that did not reach Guadalajara from San Blas—a distance of more than three hundred miles! They were intended for service in battery, during the revolt of 1825. Each was under the guidance of one hundred and fifty Indians with animals, and it occupied many months in accomplishing the transit; but notwithstanding these ample means, I'll venture to affirm that no one in his natural senses, after making the journey, could be induced to believe that anything greater than a mule-pack—to say nothing of an enormous piece of ordnance—could be transported over such numbers of streams, ravines, paths and mountains! The thing seems nearly impossible.

We toiled over the Barrancas—threaded the valleys below, when taking another ascent, we attained a level, barren uncultivated region, and shortly drew bridles at the great Meson of *Muchatilla*. From an outside view of the spacious inn—its fanciful frescos, and highly brilliant exterior—we reasonably inferred that something even more delectable might be found

within. Yet although the patrona was neither ill-looking nor ill-natured, she *siento 'd muchissimo*, and still declared there was naught more palatable than *frijoles*. However, our appetites were keen, and we made a good deal go a little way, for we had ridden nineteen leagues since midnight. Bidding adieu to my *vivo* mule, by patting his sleek neck—not the least the worse for his work, while the horses were well nigh done up,—I gave him a loaf of bread, in gratitude for bearing me safely. With a fresh relay of horses, and the sun on the meridian, we left the brightly-painted meson, and continued our journey. Ever since mounting up to the *tierra templada*, near Tepic, the climate had been delightful—neither uncomfortably warm during the day, nor too cool to travel with a serapa at night. By urging our cattle we made ten leagues, and reached the town of Madalena at twilight, where a stubborn old administrador refused to give me a change of horses. The fact was I deceived myself, in supposing the journey could be made as quickly by taking a cavallada from one city to another, as by the government post; and through ignorance of the formalities, I had omitted to take out a license. It is a very simple process, and consists in merely paying exorbitantly, at about the rate of a third of a dollar per league for the privilege of demanding beasts from agents on the roads—that is supposing they are to be had, and generally they are not; but if there chance to be found any beasts in the corral, they are such horrid brutes, as not to be worth, even to a cunning cabman, the rial you are to pay per league. These are the animals pertaining to the Republic. After a mournful inspection of their raw hides and protruding ribs, the administrador may possibly hint that if the traveller requires a good horse there are two or three belonging to a neighbor that might be pro-



cured by paying over and over the legal charge. This system of corruption is the chief cause of the heavy expense of travelling in Mexico: honesty in its lightest sense is unknown, and the principle throughout nearly all classes is one of fraud and extortion. Indeed if the rage for foreign travel ever leads our rising generations to extend their tours to these lands, their respectable governors will deserve much sympathy on cashing the bills, and perhaps be induced to believe that their progeny have fallen among the Philistines.

Finding nothing was to be gained from the Madelena proprietor of horse-flesh, I betook myself to the Alcalde; my special passport making it imperative on all military and civil authorities to afford me succor, sustenance, and all sorts of *ausilios*—that is if they deemed advisable;—but I depended more upon the yellow onças in my trowsers-pocket, which gave a zest to their exertions, and did not render them lukewarm in complying with the orders conveyed in the passport. The townspeople were under arms, and a guard of some thirty paisanos were assembled outside the courtroom. They received me with a “present arms,” and one adept in soldiery let his musket fall to the stone floor, exploding the piece, and driving a mass of paper wads, and a quantity of slugs, over the gateway; whereupon they all put by their weapons, and whacked the unfortunate victim over the head with sabres. My terror subsiding, I presented myself to the Alcalde, whom I found—*mirabile dictu*—quite a civil, intelligent young man. He informed me that a strong body of highwaymen had occupied a hill within a league of the town, and every evening succeeded in carrying off what they required, by breaking into houses, maltreating the residents, and robbing every man, woman, and child on the road. He strongly urged me to defer my journey until troops

which were expected, could arrive, and in this he was seconded by a number of travellers, who were also awaiting safe convoy. The advice, though well intended, was far from changing my purpose to proceed, and after receipting for the value of the horses in case of capture, I prepared for a start. There being no regular soldiers in the place, no money could induce the timid paisanos to act as escort; and then I began to discover the true value of my guides. They had been under the ban of my displeasure for cheating me with their beasts; but they had determined faces, and in reply to my question if they intended to fight, both exclaimed, *Hasta muerto! Señor*—until death!—this restored them to favor. Entrusting each with a sum of money, I drew the loads from their carbines, carefully recharged them with balls and buck-shot, looked to my own pistols, and mounted. Moving quietly through the back streets of the town, we struck the main road, where we encountered a poor Padre who had been robbed of seventeen dollars, relieved of his mule, and stripped of all his raiment, save gown and cravat. *Santa Maria!* said my *mozos*—“no respect for the church!” The good priest gave us his blessing, and the exact position of the villains. *Adios, mi padre!* It was eleven at night, the moon was rising, and we kept the horses nearly as possible in the shade of the roadside foliage—going very leisurely—until on the slope of a hill to the right, we saw a number of fires casting a lurid blaze around, and figures moving before them. Approaching nearer, a din of shouts, chaunts, and laughter, saluted our ears, for the rogues were evidently making merry over their potations. The road sounded hollow over the hard clay, and on descending a narrow canal-like passage, that just left our heads visible above, we unslung carbines, and with cocked weapons, I gave the word—



*Vamos*—let us fly. The noise of horses' hoofs thundering over the hard ground instantly attracted attention; we were greeted by loud yells of *Quien es? halta! halta!*—and plainly saw a score or more running to intercept us, with the barrels of their arms glancing in the moonlight; but deuce the syllable did we utter, but driving the spur yet deeper into our steeds, we went flying along, single file; in thirty seconds we were shielded by a high wall of rocks, and in a short time had lost sight and sound of our pursuers. I think they were quite unprepared for travellers at so late an hour, or our flight could easily have been barred. Yet it is anything else than a joke, to be encircled by a legion of these scamps—stripped stark naked—certainly beaten and robbed—or perhaps shot. Besides there are so many nice secluded spots, where, like Fra Diavolo, “on a rock reclining,” behind a jutting ledge, or precipice, these rascals could insinuate the dark barrel of a carbine in one's ear, and cry *Entregarse, o no la Vida!*—surrender, or your life!—Not pleasant, surely, and I was delighted to escape scot free—clothed in my breeks.

At full gallop we rode into the town of Tequila: considerably fatigued, for I had not slept in forty hours, excepting perhaps now and then a brief cat-nap in the saddle—of a second or two duration—wherein one may dream of years of adventure. However, I determined to hold on twelve leagues beyond, to Guadalajara. It was daylight, and I found Tequila quite a large place: with picturesque church, clusters of fine trees, all snugly posed in a bowl-like valley—fertile and well watered, with extensive plantations of the *argave* extending far as the eye could compass, over the neighboring country.

Whilst a relay of horses were being sent for, the landlord of the meson accompanied me to a running brook, where I cooled

my jolted frame—swallowed a bowl of coffee, lit a cigar, and learned that we were the first travellers who had passed in five days, and that a detachment of cavalry was hourly looked for, to dislodge the rogues near Madelena. Feeling now indifferent about the matter, we got into the saddle, and once more gave spur towards our destination. The road was tolerable, the horses were better, and the country became more populous. Once the grateful steam of fried fish involuntarily caused me to halt for a hasty breakfast; but it was only for a moment—when on we rushed, up hill and down slope, splashing over water-courses—passing huge, ungainly carts with hewn timber wheels, creaking and groaning to market, while vehicles also of a more modern build lumbered slowly along, with six or eight mules ahead. Then I doffed my sombrero to a gay young officer in advance of a well-appointed troop of cavalry, and, with horses white with foam, we dismounted at the outer garita of Guadalajara. It was a small village and military post, seven leagues from the city, having a great stone arch and gateway commanding the road. Another relay, and an hour's gallop brought the spires and towers of the goodly town in sight—standing in the midst of an immense plain, and watered by a branch of the Rio Grande. Passing through a town, with a noble church and convent, we crossed the river by a substantial stone bridge, where stood statues of Santa Anna and other patriots, with their noses knocked off, and faces otherwise scarified. After being detained for inspection at a guard-house, we entered the city proper, through long lines of paved streets, until we pulled up in front of the palace, at the house of Don Domingo Llamas, to whom I had letters.