

CHAPTER XXXI.

GUADALAJARA is a beautiful city, of an hundred thousand people, laid out in broad, regular streets, with solid and imposing houses, painted outside gaily in frescoes—and plazas, fountains, shady alamedas, richly-adorned churches, and fine public buildings. It is the capital of the populous province of Jalisco, famed for its wealth, and only second in importance to the city of Mexico itself. The crowds of well-dressed pedestrians that thronged the streets and squares, the well-appointed troops, elegance of the buildings, and smart appearance of equipages and dashing horsemen, all gave the air, even at a rapid glance, of great ease and opulence.

The gentleman to whom I was endorsed, Señor Llamas, had been in early life an *arriero*, but by the force of merit and ability he had urged himself to his level, and became a person of immense wealth, universally respected, and occupying a place of high judicial trust under the state. He possessed more energy, quickness and enthusiasm, than any Mexican I met with, before or since. After arranging in the minutest details everything for my comfort and speed on the road, I went to a very good stopping-place, the *Fonda de Diligencia*. Here I bathed, and slept until the streets became noisy with vehicles and horses passing for the afternoon's drive. Facing my balcony, in an opposite dwelling, there appeared a lady of exceeding beauty, or, as the porter of the

hotel told me in reply to my exclamation, *Si Señor ! bonita como un peso*—lovely as a dollar. She first appeared at the gilt-railed balcony in the dishabille of the country, that is, with only skirts of the dress—the sleeves and bodice hanging down in front; leaving the person from waist up only slightly concealed by the *camisetta*, which half reveals and half hides the shoulders and bosom. One must be blind, indeed, not to become something of a connoisseur in female beauty, after residing any length of time in Mexico; for the flimsy veil, which is usually worn in the day by all classes of women, only serves, by the pliant grace of their movements, to render their forms more defined and attractive. But to return to my *vis-a-vis*. At a second visit to the balcony, the bodice was laced, and superb masses of hair fell like a dark cloud over neck and arms. At a later period the toilette was completed, with a lace mantilla, and her tresses braided in two long plaits. A dear little baby was crowing upon her breast, and the beautiful Señora amused herself by entwining and knotting the braids of her hair under the infant's arms, when she swung the little fellow to and fro, in the most graceful manner conceivable. I never beheld so charming a duet. The bell sounded for dinner—there was a well-set table, and among a number of pleasant conversable persons, I made the acquaintance of a particularly intelligent and amiable priest, who very kindly acted as cicerone in my after rambles. We rose from the table d'hôte as the military band began the night's performance in the plaza. The marble-paved paths and the benches were filled before we got there, and we found some difficulty in getting places; but when my cigar got fairly under way, and eyes widely open, I did and do still take it upon me to affirm, that no town in the universe can boast of so much female beauty. Not only were they in fives, but fifties. My

friend, the little Padre, appeared to be very generally beloved. Nearly all paused a moment to say a kind word or greeting, and thus I had a clear chance of observing the pretty throngs that swept by. They were so tastefully attired in full flowing and becoming skirts, with no awkward stays or corsets to cramp the grace of motion—the coquettish *ribosa*, never quiet an instant, but changing its silken folds, and half revealing the glancing neck and arm!—the hair, too; such hair! *ay de mi!* no odious bonnets to conceal God's fair handiwork!—then their arched tiny feet, kissing the marble pavement, with so firm, so light, yet dignified a tread—and then the elders, sailing majestically astern of their lovely convoys—like ships of the line—regarding with wary eyes privateers in disguise of gay young cavaliers, crossing their track. *Hola!* what blockade could intercept those softly audible murmurs! or the light downy touch of dimpled fingers, quick as a swallow's kiss to his mate! or, more than all, withstand the languid, lightning glances flashed from their upper deck of eyes! *Avé purísima!* the waking hours by day, and sleepless ones by night, that Spanish maidens have caused me! “I'm not a lover now,” but still, I derived great consolation in admiring these sweet doncellas; and fearing a relapse to former maladies, I shook hands with the Padre, buckled on spurs and sabre, and as the cathedral bell was tolling ten, I was leaving Guadalajara, with its blaze of lights and beauty, behind me.

Taking the main road for three hours, we crossed the Great Bridge, and turning to the north, struck the route of the Haciendas, which in lieu of smooth travelling and robbers, possessed the advantages of safety, and a more direct communication to the interior. At daylight, we had ridden nineteen leagues, on capital animals, who never once slackened the reins in their

mouths. I was not only indebted to Don Domingo for these excellent adjuncts to my journey, but for a few written lines also, to divers persons along the road, which seemed to infuse them with a portion of their master's energy; besides, he had sent his own trusty courier with me as guide. This was an old man of sixty, strong, active, and honest: in youth he had proved himself a brave soldier; in virtue of which he was permitted to carry—besides his carbine—a long lance, and pennon that fluttered in the breeze. He frequently went without sleep, for three days and nights successively, when riding express for his patron. I made old Cypriano my commissary, and he always became frightfully incensed, when called upon to pay more than he deemed the service demanded; but again he would laugh heartily, when urging a beast that had been overcharged, with a lash and a kick at every leap—which he called taking a *medios* worth. Indeed Cypriano, from long riding, had become a little callous, in thus visiting the sins of the masters upon the beasts, and believed in the superstition, that hired horses had no souls.

The face of the country was fast losing its abruptness; mountains were verging into hills with table tops, and long sweeping undulations stretching away in the hazy distance. It was very open, fertile, and well-tilled, but neither wooded, nor so profusely watered as the lands seaward of Guadalajara.

Early in the afternoon we entered the little town of Tepantitlan, where a huge wheezing gentleman gave me a brute troubled with his own complaint, but transferring him to the treatment of Doctor Cypriano, we then got on in fine style. The night was far advanced when we reached a round, portly mountain, called Cerro Gordo; where tarrying at a small settlement, the keeper of a rancho surlily resisted opening his gateway, until he heard the

talismanic name of Don Domingo—then the door nearly flew off the hinges. A relay was, with some delay and trouble, procured, when again in the saddle. The road was stony and tortuous, so that we had thirteen tedious leagues to crawl and stumble over. Gladly we threw ourselves from the fagged-out beasts, and sought the residence of a good-natured paisano, owning a large rancho, a large wife, and two large daughters. Giving orders to be called in an hour, my spurs were no sooner unclasped than I fell into heavy slumber, on a low bed beneath an image of the virgin. When the time had expired, I was aroused by my faithful guide. One of the girls was seated on the ground, near the fire, with a stone trough and roller before her, busily employed with a batch of unleavened dough, of which, when consistently kneaded, she would catch up a dab, press it between the palms, and as the mass enlarged she began patting and tossing it from hand to hand until it spread into round, thin cakes; they were then laid upon a flat piece of sheet-iron, and browned over the fire; these were *tortillas*: they have a taste like the oaten-cakes in Scotland, and are not particularly palatable to a young practitioner. A chicken had also been grilled on sticks, which, with a mixture they called coffee, served me for breakfast.

Horses were ready in the corral, and saying adios to the fat family, we galloped away. A bathe in a roadside brook, and two changes of beasts, and at three in the afternoon we toiled slowly over some dry, chalky hills, and looked down upon Los Pueblos del Rincon. It was a very pretty, verdant spot, almost hidden in foliage, and reposing in an angle of wide and extended plateau. Having a note to the Commandante, I went straight to his quarters: but being a merchant as well as soldier, I was told he could be found at his shop, in the plaza. On going thither he was

indulging in siesta, and notwithstanding the urgency of my requests, no one could be found foolhardy enough to disturb his slumbers; nor was I permitted to do so myself. I then trotted across the square, and presented my passports to the Alcalde, who having already been mollified by repose, consented to find some brave individual to awaken the sleeping rajah opposite. "*Señor*," said I, hat in hand, "very sorry to incommode you, but necessity of the case," and so forth. He continued scowling quite ferociously while buttoning his trowsers, and as he pulled over his suspenders, and arranged them to his satisfaction, demanded what was wanted. "Oh, nothing!" said I, "merely an order from General Yañes in Guadalajara," throwing the missive towards him. It acted as a charm: "*Jésu, Señor*, excuse me—those rascals never told me you were waiting!"

Good animals were soon provided; and amid all Don Manuel Garcia's generosity, he was pleased to sell me a bottle of sour wine from the *tienda*; for which we ran his beasts, with a heavy thunder-storm of wind and rain close upon our heels for a long six leagues. The road had led through a rich, level district, covered with forests of fine timber, and abounding in cultivated fields of grain. Presently clusters of spires and towers sprang from the plain, and coursing through suburbs of walled gardens, convents, and country dwellings—all gratefully reposing beneath the shade of overhanging trees—we entered the city of Leon. It includes, with the environs, a thriving population of near sixty thousand souls; delightfully situated in the heart of one of the most salubrious table-lands of the higher terraces of Mexico. The town, though inferior to Guadalajara in elegance, can still boast of much manufacturing wealth, with fine churches, spacious squares, and great uniformity in the general construction of the

houses, while streams of pure water traverse it in every street, and irrigate the extensive suburbs around. Indeed, let a Spaniard alone for choosing a pleasant site, near good water; not that these their descendants have any cleanly predilections that way, for, on the contrary—except for the commonest purposes of drinking—their general filthiness of habit induces the belief that they are universally imbued with a hydrophobial aversion thereto.

We rode through one of the main avenues of the city, and entered the grand plaza as the great bell of the cathedral was slowly tolling for *oración*, and unconsciously we checked the horses, to behold a vast concourse of many thousands silently kneel—with uncovered heads, and faces turned towards the church—whilst all was hushed to perfect stillness. I never was more deeply impressed with an emotion of awe and solemnity.

Three sides of the large square were lined with *portales*, or arcades; with every archway and open space filled with venders of glass, cigars, cutlery, saddlery, bridlery, and every kind of horse equipment; all, however, destitute of workmanlike finish. The plaza itself was crowded with itinerant traders, screaming in every possible intonation of voice, their different wares. Stalls and booths were also doing a large business in *licores* and fried bits of meat, *frijoles* and *tortillas*, but what carried away the commercial palm by long odds, were the *dulce* women. There were a number of these popular saleswomen, squatted beneath huge umbrellas, full ten feet in diameter—surrounded by crowds of buyers—to whom they were dispensing papers of colored sugars, candies, and sweatmeats unceasingly. I passed them again the next morning, when they appeared busy as ever; and I was an eye-witness to a little incident, wherein a centavo's worth of sugar was the cause of

a fatal stab. A lepero was purchasing a bit of chocolate—it fell in the dirt, when another, probably thinking it a lawful prize, seized it, and took a large bite; whereupon the lawful owner swung a mass of heavy steel spurs attached to his wrist, jingling with some force, on the offender's head. In a second down dropped the spurs, and serapas were wound round the left arms. With low, deep curses and flashing eyes, their knives gleamed in the light; the spectators cleared a ring, and to work they went. I sprang upon a stone pillar, to be out of harm's way, and thus had a clear view of the fray. Their blades were very unequally matched: one was at least eight inches, and the other not half that measurement; but both appeared adepts at the game,—watching each other like wild cats, ready for a spring—moving cautiously to and fro, making feints by the shielded arm, or stamp of the foot, for a minute or two; when, quick as a flash, I saw two rapid passes made by both: blood spirted from an ugly wound in the spur-vender's throat, but at the same moment his short weapon sealed the doom of his antagonist, and he lay stretched upon the ground, as lifeless as the bloody steel that struck him. I glanced at the wounds after the affair had terminated, and found the knife had been plunged twice directly in the region of the heart. There was no effort or attempt made by the beholders to arrest the parties; and the survivor caught up his spurs—a bystander quickly folded a handsome kerchief to his neck—and threading the crowd he was soon out of sight. The corpse was laid upon a liquor-stand, with a delf platter upon the breast.

My letter was to apparently the mercantile nabob of Leon, Don Miguel Obregon. He had a long range of *tiendas*, with a handsome dwelling filling a large space, facing the square. He

received me civilly—had places taken in the diligence, which fortunately left the following morning—and leaving my horse-trappings in his charge, I engaged a jaunty young valet, who looked far more respectable than his new master. He was dressed in blue velvet slashed trowsers, silver buttons thick as peas, embroidered shirt, with a glazed sombrero and silver band. Juan conducted me to a meson, which, like all other native inns in the republic of Mexico, has two large enclosures, or court yards: the inner ones with stalls for beasts, and the other for bipeds—the only difference is, that the accommodations for the latter animals are closer and the apartments more confined, having as a luxury a chair, and solid brick structures raised a little way from the ground, whereon one may sleep, if he can endure the filth and fleas. This is all the furniture they rejoice in. Each lodger has a key to his own quarters, and the main gateway is guarded continually—not, however, sufficiently vigilant as to the society admitted; for the patios are crowded with improper persons, who every few minutes make flying trips around the inn, knocking at the doors; then, droves of beasts coming or going—clattering over the paved yards, mingled with the whistles and shouts of the *arrieros*—are not altogether provocative of repose. At the *Caravansera* where I lodged, there was a hump-backed Ganymede, of the most hideous kind. I have thought since, he would have been a mine of wealth to an enterprising showman; or, in the dark ages, have made an acceptable present to some bold Baron. Although not more than five feet in height, his thin lucifer-match-like legs, being split up to the hump, gave him the stride of a giant! and what with keen, glittering, beady eyes, and the footfall of a cat, he made my flesh creep whenever he came near me.

Every body is his own cook and housekeeper in Mexican

mesons; and old Cypriano having procured me a wool mattress that fairly danced with *pulgas*, and some long tallow links, which we stuck around the walls—having no fears of a conflagration—I despatched Juan for the best supper to be found. This amounted to red wine, beans and sausages. However, we made merry, and treated some gay damsels outside to the remains of our bottle. Cypriano then extinguished our illumination, and stretching himself on the threshold, covered by his serapa, with a weapon beside him, he left me to repose. It was my first night's rest since leaving San Blas, that is, if the pile of bricks and mortar which upheld my frame could reasonably be supposed to afford it. Yet the fleas, for once, caused me no sensible annoyance, and I regained my feet at sunrise, in readiness for further journeyings. I was pleased, too, at the prospect of quitting the saddle for a coach, although with good beasts I preferred the former: but to be subjected to the misery of a racker—then a pacer—then a trot or gallop—and by way of change, a horrible combination of all, with rapid travelling, is not only enough to jar one's nerves and aid his digestion, but to give a disinclination for a continuance of it.

Parting with old Cypriano, who gave me some sensible advice about entrusting Juan with too much change, I sought the Diligence Fonda—swallowed a hasty breakfast, and with no heavier baggage than a spare shirt and tooth-brush, took my place.

Contrary to expectation, and agreeably disappointed, I found the coach a thorough modern-built Yankee vehicle—comfortable and strong, with noble teams of five and six horses, that tugged us along quite ten miles the hour. The road was good, and a heavy shower had slaked the dust. The country was again broken into rocky hills and ravines. At two o'clock we reached the

richest mining district of Mexico, in the neighborhood of Guanajuato. Within a league of the city proper the route leads through a valley into a deep split gorge, with rugged, arid hills running high up on all sides. Passing a number of mining *haciendas* of great extent, the city, bit by bit, begins to unfold itself. It presents a most extraordinary and picturesque appearance. The houses seem toppling one upon the other—built in zig-zags, up and down sharp corners and defiles—with the spire or towers of some church perched away in mid-heaven, all brightly frescoed—the bases and gorges below being filled in with thick mist—leaving the loftier portions in distinct outline—closely resembling a city suspended in the sky. No scene of the theatre could be painted more singularly novel. It fairly made me giddy, as we came whirling through the outer defiles—turning hither and thither—catching a panoramic view of the town, like a glimpse in a prism, or revolutions of a kaleidoscope—when every moment one might expect the whole fabric thrown into a sparkling succession of bright colors—and what with the continual booming of reports from blastings in the distant mines, I felt quite relieved when the diligence dashed down a little pit of a plaza, and drove through a *porte cochere* into the court-yard of our *Fonda*.

My coach companions were pleasant fellows—there was a padre, two mining agents, a gentlemanly young Mexican officer who had been adjutant to Valencia, at the battle of Churubusco, and beside me sat a gentleman possessing a remarkably handsome face and person, with the loss of his right arm. He was French, Mons. Ribaud; he had been many years in the country—was intimately associated with the leading chiefs and revolutions of Mexico—had fought desperately, bore the marks of honorable wounds, and was a man of much military experience and acknow-

ledged bravery; but latterly, owing to strong personal hostility existing between him and Santa Anna, he had not been employed in battles of the North or valley of Mexico. I found Monsieur Ribaud delightful in conversation, and he related to me many adventures that had befallen him during his long residence in the republic. On alighting from the coach, I attended him to the commandante's, where my passport was properly considered and countersigned, and an aide-de-camp kindly volunteered to be my guide to the mint of the English directory. Here I was presented to the superintendent, Mr. Jones, an American, from Connecticut, who appeared pleased to meet a countryman, and showed me over the establishment.

The machinery was of the most primitive kind—the stamping process worked by hand, with a lateral wooden beam acting upon a perpendicular screw; at each end of the beam there was attached a small rope, pulled by four men, with an aperture in the floor sufficiently large to admit a man, just within arm's length of the stamp, who was employed placing smooth coins beneath the dies—one would naturally suppose at the imminent risk of having his finger and thumb nipped off at every half revolution of the lever; but practice renders the operative skilful at the manipulation, and the screw descends, makes the impression, which is as regularly displaced by the smooth dollar and ready fingers of the man below. There were two of these apparatus, and they were only able to coin about thirty thousand pieces in twenty-four hours. The contrivance is surely a bad one, very tedious and expensive. The coiners received seven-eighths of a dollar per thousand, and instances of dishonesty were rarely known. The dies were of English manufacture, but the reason why Mexican money presents such a rough and unfinished appearance, is purely owing

to their government, who insist upon the impressions being fac similes of those heretofore coined at their own mints.

The smelting process, the rolling, nipping, and milling machines, were all much behind the age, and although the silver mines were producing more than ever before known, and more than, at the period of my visit, could by any possibility be coined, yet the directory have taken no measures to introduce the valuable and beautiful labor-saving improvements now in operation in Europe and the United States, where the same work could be accomplished by fewer persons, executed certainly at infinitely less expense, and with far greater facility and despatch.

I saw vast piles of pure metal in the vaults, and uncountable masses of dollars. Before leaving, I was introduced to Mr. Bruff, treasurer to the institution, who, with Mr. Jones, treated me with every attention and civility.

Our *Fonda de la diligencia* was well kept, commodious and respectable; we sat down to the ordinary as a multitude of sweet-sounding bells were ringing and chiming away with their brazen throats for evening vespers, and after partaking of a Frenchified Mexican dinner, I sallied out for a walk. My companion knew the town, but in wandering about the steep angular elevations, I never dared to look up without catching hold of a balcony or leaning against a wall, fearful of becoming dizzy, and tumbling down somewhere.

Entering the *gran sociedad*, we passed through a long suite of bright saloons—nearly suffocated by cigar smoke, or deafened by the incessant clicking of billiard balls—when we came to the *monté* and *loto* rooms. Here were grouped around a dozen different tables hundreds of players, from the plumed hats and shining lace of officers, to the mean dirty serapas of soldiers and leperos; all, howe-

ver, earnestly intent marking with grains of corn the numbers on the cards, as they were yelled forth by the *loto* man, who was seated on a raised platform at one end of the hall, watching the little ivory spheres as they dropped one by one out of a cylindrical box revolving before him. Further on were the *monteros* at work—with heaps of gold and silver piled around—with eager faces, compressed lips, and glittering eyes absorbed in the intense interest of the game—not a word or gesture save the dull monotonous voice of the dealers, like to the tolling of a bell—*Juégo señores! se va!* with eyes that never winked and lids rigid as sheet-iron. The cards were pulled slowly and carefully one from the other, until the game was decided, when took place the rattling chink of coins, with maybe the deep uttered *carajo!* of some unlucky wight who has lost a last stake; yet even he pursues the easy dignity of his race, rolls and lights a *cigarrillo*, draws his cloak around him, raises his *sombrero* gracefully, and with a polite *Hasta mañana señores!* disappears from the table.

While moving about the apartments, my comrade pointed out two young men in the Mexican uniform of captains, who were deserters from the American army; one had been a lieutenant, named Sullivan; both bore the marks of dissipation in unmistakable lines around their faces.

We again touched our hats, an invariable sign of courtesy, religiously practised by all civilized beings on entering or leaving a public assemblage, and walked into the street. We took a sort of corkscrew promenade for a little space, when, by some strange flight of footsteps, we found ourselves on the pavement of a triangular platform. Like to the frame of a convex mirror, encasing a sheet of blue moonlit sky—lay before, and as it were, trembling and tottering above us—one of the many remarkable

and scenic views of Guanajuato. Full in front against the vaulted sky stood a double towered church, with dome, spires and windows glistening like a transparency, then circling around were bright, gay-colored dwellings, with lights dancing from casement to casement, while each separate cornice, balcony and window, threw back to the silver moon a thousand sparkling reflections—all admirably contrasted with the sombre shadows of the deep gorge below. The scene was truly beautiful, and when within a few feet of our position, the full soft tones of a piano came thrilling through the still night, and a female voice rose high and sweetly, "ah!" cried my friend, "there's a deal to live for yet;" and we retraced our windings to the inn.

We were aroused at the first cock-crow, to take our seats in the diligence; and rattling out of the city by the road we came, mounted a steep eminence, when, gaining a flat sandy region, we soon lost sight of Guanajuato. During the forenoon we passed through a number of fine populous towns. At Irapuato, M. Ribaud and his friend left us. In Salamanca, where we stopped to bait and change horses, a number of beggars surrounded the coach, and in one I at once detected the pure Milesian brogue and visage. He was whining and limping about, with a tattered hat and stick, imploring alms in the most ludicrous attempts at the Castilian tongue. "Why, Pat, you're a deserter," said I, from the top of the vehicle. "Who siz that?" quoth he, evidently startled. Forgetting his infirmities, clapping on his sombrero, and clenching the stick in readiness for a fight, or flight, as he peered among the crowd; and stepping up to a miserable leper, whose face had been painfully stereotyped into a broad grin, he poked him sharply in the ribs, and roared out, "Ye lie, ye baste! I was sick in the hospital, and the Ginerál tuk me aff

in his own carridge." Here, Pat, I'm your man! "Ah' is it there ye are, Liftinint? you're a pacock ov a boy! will ye give us a rial?" No! but if you chance to be caught by the Yankees, you'll get a rial's worth of "hearty-chokes and caper-sauce," I replied, going through a little pantomime with heels and neck, for his especial benefit. "No, be jasus! thim Harney blaggards will niver choke me while the Dons is so ginerous." This was the last I saw or heard from Pat.

We rolled rapidly along all day, in great trepidation concerning robbers, since the same diligence had been plundered for the eight successive days previous. There were four inside, besides my boy and myself. Early in the morning, a small, fierce-looking Yucatanese was savagely bent upon slaying whoever should cross our path, and, by the way, this Don Pancho was a perfect specimen of an ambulating armory—having no less than two brace of holster pistols, a revolver, sword, *cuchillo*, and his coat pockets filled with enough ammunition to have resisted a siege. The two last and critical posts were at hand, and together we mounted the box, with weapons in readiness. Whilst changing horses for the last time, the stout *cochero*—and a very expert whip he was—evinced some curiosity to know whether we intended shooting *los compadres*—this is polite slang for highwaymen—in case of attack. Being satisfied on that point, he declared he would not draw a rein until we again got inside. The warlike Yucatanese seconded him, protesting, in his cowardice, that he was solely actuated by fears of compromising the good driver; he accordingly entered the vehicle, hinting that his plan would be, on the first onslaught, to ensconce himself under the body of the coach, and rapidly discharge a broadside at the enemy—a mode of tactics I by no means subscribed to. It convinced me, however, that

there was collusion between robbers and *cochero*, to make the most out of their prey, and I unequivocally assured the stout driver, that if he did not lash the beasts upon the first signs of danger, he should go halves with his *compadres* from the contents of my pistols; moreover, I still persisted in retaining a position on top, in which I was ably seconded by a delicate young French artiste, who volunteered to do his *possible*, if he could be supplied with arms: thereupon we made a forcible seizure from the stock of the brave Don Pancho. There were but two other passengers, who, not having a dollar in their purses, or a stealable garment on their persons, expressed utter indifference as to the course of events, lit cigars, and crouched beneath the seats.

At last the long thong of hide was jerked from the leaders' heads, and away they plunged like demons. We sped on for a league or more, over a smooth broad road, lined with dense foliage of cactus and vines; keeping a wary look-out, and occasionally cautioning the driver, at the risk of his brains, to give his horses the rein, at the first appearance of our expected visitors. Indeed I was on the point of congratulating myself upon escaping their clutches altogether, when, as we whirled quickly towards a slight declivity, the progress of the vehicle was necessarily impeded by a few roods of rocky, uneven road; and at the same moment—*Voilà!* said my companion, *Voilà! les voleurs!* Like magic sprang up on either side, behind and ahead, a dozen villanous-looking scoundrels; whilst to the right, upon a gentle knoll, were as many more mounted, holding the animals of their brethren, and calmly regarding the sport before them. I instantly levelled a pistol at a gentleman with a raised carbine in one hand, and sombrero coolly doffed in the other, who was courteously observing to the *cochero*, *Como estamos, Don Pepe?*—how

are we?—he was directly ahead of the leaders, and as my finger sought the trigger, Don Pepe knocked the barrel up with his whip, and shouted,—“we are good people!” Becoming conscious of the folly of contending against such odds, I sank back to await my fate. I noticed one swarthy old villain on horseback, who appeared chief of the gang, and was withal rather uneasy, urging his *hijos*—children—*Presto! de prisa! hombre!*—hurry! make haste!—and with good reason too, for hardly had the villains opened the coach-doors, and commenced rifling the gallant Pancho, whilst two more had clambered up the wheels, to have an overhaul of the French painter and myself, when a voice cried out—*Los dragones! los dragones!*—and the clash of sabres greeted our ears: *Los dragones! los dragones!* cried we all. Away hopped the agile *compadres* from the horses' heads, down jumped others from boot and wheels, off they scampered right and left, and in a few seconds they were seen galloping off in direction of the adjacent hills. The old bandit who directed their movements was delayed a moment behind the bushes in tightening his saddle girth. My fingers itched to have a crack at him; but although, *De los enemigos los menos*—of enemies the fewer the better—be a sage maxim, yet upon reflecting that we might have been favored by the whole retreating troop with a volley from their carbines—and that a coach full of passengers was not a small target—I very sensibly left the weapon beneath the cushions. All this transpired so rapidly that when the green jackets of the troopers became visible a long way up the road, we were entirely relieved of our besiegers. My companion counted twenty-six, but they got absolutely nothing for their trouble; much to my regret, however, for I was in hopes the Yucatanese

would have been handsomely plucked, instead of only having his coat well nigh rent in tatters!

The dragoons were an escort sent to guard a member of the Mexican deputies, who was expected by the coach. They answered our purpose quite as well. Nothing further occurred, except arresting a couple of suspicious individuals on the road, and attended by the cavalry, we soon arrived at the Garita of Querétaro. Here the brave Don Pancho had recovered his wits, and wished to play collector for our escort, crying out *Astojá la bolsa, Señor*, — milk the purse; — but dispensing with his services, I gave the sergeant the only ounce I had; much better pleased to give it voluntarily, even to be devoted to *monté*, than to have it squeezed out by the ladrons.

CHAPTER XXXII

I ARRIVED in Querétaro on the 20th of May—seven and a-half days from San Blas. It is an antiquated city, built when rich mines were yielding their treasures in the vicinity, and as a consequence, there is no lack of handsome private edifices, and numbers of splendid churches. It stands nearly seven thousand feet above the sea, and enjoys a most delightful temperature. A noble aqueduct of two miles in length, with arches ninety feet high—spanning a plain of meadow-land—joins a tunnel from the opposite hills, and leads an abundance of excellent water, from ten miles beyond, to the city. It is a solid and enduring structure, built by the munificence of an old Spaniard, the Marquis de Villadil, previous to the Revolution. Of late years Querétaro had lost a large portion of its population; the mines have become nearly exhausted, and it is without manufactures, or inland trade. After the occupation by the American troops of the city of Mexico, it became the headquarters of the Government, and seat of the General Congress; and again all the world had flocked thither, and not a tenantless house or spare nook was to be found. Crowds were thronging the wide, well-paved streets, and mounted troops and foot-soldiers, with ear-aching music of cornets, trumpets and drums, were moving in all directions about the city as we entered.