

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.

I had letters to an Hanoverian gentleman—Mr. George Best—who very hospitably lodged me at his dwelling. From him I learned that the treaty had already passed the Chamber of Deputies, and only awaited the action of the Senate to become a law, and that the United States Commissioners had been apprised of it by the Minister of Foreign Relations, sent express, the day of my arrival. I determined to continue my journey, and made all preparations for leaving on the morrow.

During the night there arose a terrible crashing thunder-storm, and a large church near us was struck by the *rayo*, shattering the great clock, and “temple and tower came to the ground,” with much jingle and confusion. I slept in happy ignorance of the whole affair.

I was unavoidably detained until late in the afternoon. With post-horses, and a single guide, we toiled over an elevated sierra at the back of the city, and taking the bridle route, rode like Jehus all night; only interrupted by changing animals, every seven or eight leagues. Once the post-boy's nag gave up the ghost, which was the cause of an hour's detention to procure another; and again, at a break-neck pace I rode full tilt into a sleeping drove of swine, when my horse floundered on his face, and I was shot like a battering ram into a puddle of mire. With these trifling mishaps, we gave rein and spur, trusting to the beasts' guidance in the dark night—over bad roads, hills, and streams—until day dawned, when tarrying for a bath and bowl of coffee, we again hurried onward. At noon we struck the main route, and I was gratified to learn the Commissioners had not passed. Without pausing, we arrived within five leagues of Mexico, where, from a slight elevation, my guide exclaimed—*Señor! mire vd la escolta!* Some distance below us wound a

large cavalcade, with four-in-hand coaches, and trains, attended by squadrons of cavalry, magnificently mounted on dark bay horses, with sabres and housings flashing in the sun. I knew it at a glance to be the American escort. Saluting the officer leading the advance, and stating my mission from the Pacific, I was immediately presented to the Ministers, and, much to my own relief, delivered the despatches. There were a large number of officers in the escort; some old friends, too, with whom I had parted in as many different portions of the globe. Retracing my steps in company to the village I had just previously left, the cavalcade halted, and I was instructed to proceed, and report myself to the General-in-Chief in Mexico.

Once more I galloped away, while the splendid squadrons of dragoons moved slowly along by the opposite road. In two hours' quick riding, we turned short round a bluff promontory, and entered the great valley; then for the first time I saw—far, far beyond—arise, in Alpine grandeur, the snowy peaks of Popocatepetl and Iztaccuehuatl, and nearer, the clustering towers that sprang up from the famed city of the Aztecs.

Our course traversed luxuriantly fertile plains, over one of the broad causewayed roads radiating from the city—beautifully shaded by noble trees, with canals of running water on either side—until at last we passed the unguarded garitas, and entered what Cortez called *la mas hermosa cosa en el mundo*—the prettiest thing in the world—Mexico!

Trotting through a long, straight street, that appeared interminable, I stopped at a sign of *Bains Français*, where, alighting and getting quit of the horses, I plunged into a warm bath: then being shampooed with spirits—much to the horror of an attendant, who at first imagined it was my intention to apply the whole

bottle inwardly—and feeling much refreshed, I ventured out on a voyage of discovery. The streets were filled with soldiers, and I had no difficulty in finding the quarters of the Commander-in-Chief, not, however, until becoming sufficiently wearied, wandering about the city in quest of acquaintances, of whose address I had been advised. But they were all abroad, and the rain coming on with darkness, I succeeded in making my way to the residence of General Butler. He was alone, and after an hour's conversation, he politely sent an orderly with me to hunt up my friends. We stopped at a coach-stand, but the instant the soldier requested a vehicle, the whole worshipful company of coachmen seized their reins and drove off like magic. The reason of this ballet appeared to be, as the orderly hinted, that they were "done" so frequently by the volunteers! Nevertheless, coming suddenly upon one fellow, who, by dint of a dollar beforehand, opened his door and agreed to enter our service for the time being, we drove to the clubs, cafés, sociedades, and other places of public resort, until near midnight, without finding those we were in search of, when my friend, the orderly, suggested a visit to the grand ball in the Grand Sociedad. In a few minutes I had gained admission, and making a run through the mazes of a contra danza, came plump upon the friends I sought. Though tired as possible after a fifty-six leagues ride, I could not resist the fascination of a whirl, and catching a trim little damsel around the waist, off we stamped and pirouetted through the large saloon. Accompanying an old friend to his quarters, I soon fell into heavy sleep, and never awoke until the sun was blazing in mid-day.

My visit to Mexico lasted five days. On the whole, I was not highly impressed with the city. Like all other Spanish-American built towns, the streets are laid out with great regularity and,

excepting near the suburbs, are well paved; the houses are of two stories—solid and imposing—without any attempt at architectural beauty—the shops particularly mean and insignificant for so large a town, and not remarkable for either novelty or cleanliness. The city does not cover a large space proportionate to its inhabitants, but it is seldom you meet with streets so densely crowded. In some quarters, towards evening, when leperos, vagabonds and population generally, left their dens for the open air, the main avenues were so closely packed as to make it a matter of the utmost difficulty to pass—far more people than are seen in the lazzaroni haunts at the same hour in Naples, or the great thoroughfares of London.

The Cathedral in the Plaza is a fine building, standing on the site of the ancient Aztec Teocallis, but not comparable to the meanest of its kind in Europe. The outside was very much pock-marked with musket balls. I was more pleased with the Palace than any other brick-and-mortar structure that came under my observation. It occupies the eastern face of the Square—is of two stories, and painted a light-pink tinge—with immense gateways opening into the Plaza, where were two brass guns, gleaming like gold. Apart from its historical associations, and having been the scene of many bloody struggles in the oft-repeated internal revolutions of the Republic, it has little to recommend it. The council and state chambers face the Square; they are decorated with handsome furniture and crimson hangings to correspond; lighted by noble windows, from floor to the lofty ceilings, with heavy stone balconies outside. In the adjoining building is the National Museum, where, in a court-yard, surrounded by quantities of feathers, belts, cloaks, and other Indian ornaments, was the famous sacrificial stone, that once graced the ancient Temple

of the Aztec monarchs. It is a horizontal convex wheel of granite, curiously carved in hieroglyphics on the perimeter, and having a hole and gutter on top, that received the victim's head and carried off the blood. In the *patio* of the same edifice, was a huge, ungainly colossal statue in bronze, of Philip of Spain—not worthy a second glance.

Undoubtedly I saw Mexico at disadvantage; and indeed I took more pleasure in leaning over the stone balustrades of the Palace, regarding the different regiments going through their evolutions—particularly the Seventh Infantry—who impressed me so deeply with their soldierly bearing, and national pride for the hard battles they had fought and gallantly won, as to leave no room for admiration of the curiosities to be seen of a conquered city. Indeed Mexico was almost entirely Americanized. The great *fondas* and *sociedades* were all under the dominion of Yankees—with Yankee ice, Yankee drinks, signs, manners, habits, and customs, as if the city had been from time immemorial Yankeeified all over, instead of being only occupied a short twelvemonth by the troops. I usually dined in one of these large establishments, and excepting the hall of the eating saloon—from patios to attics—on every angle of the broad flights of stairs, crowded one beside the other, were gaming-tables of every kind and description. Such a condensed essence of worldly hell, in all its glaring, disgusting frightfulness, never existed. And there never were lack of players either—no! not one but was closely surrounded by officers and soldiers—blacklegs and villains of all sorts—betting uncommonly high, too—many of the banks having sixty and eighty thousand dollars in gold alone on the tables—and once I saw a common soldier stake and win two hundred ounces at a single bet. Other saloons were filled with

Mexican girls, with music and dancing, attended by every species of vice, all going on unceasingly, day and night together. My friends called these pandemoniums the hells of Montezuma. Whether such scenes will be of future benefit to the thousands of young men whom the war had called to Mexico will be a matter for future speculation.

One afternoon, accompanied by a navy friend, we rode to Chapultepec. I had already visited the battle-grounds of the valley, but the last presented claims of greater interest. The Indian definition of the height is Grasshopper Hill. It rises very strangely from the heart of the great plain, within half a league of the city—on all sides steep and precipitous, to the elevation of about two hundred feet—and with Molino del Rey, forms a long parallelogram, completely walled around. The former position is nearest the city, the King's windmill occupying the opposite space, with a noble grove of giant cypresses between the two points.

The road runs parallel with the arches of the aqueduct, and terminates at the base of Chapultepec. A gateway opens upon a broad causeway, leading with but one angle to the esplanade of the castle. It had been occupied of late years as a military college; and, though strongly manned by artillery and infantry, was still not susceptible of using cannon to advantage, when the assailing parties had approached the base of the hill. The walls and defences were of no great strength, and not capable of resisting round shot.

I had the pleasure of being made known to the Colonel commanding the fortress, who went with me over the works, and courteously explained the nature of the different battles in the neighborhood. The flat roof of the castle commands a fine and

extensive view of the valley, city, and sierras. There were many marks of the bloody business still visible—shot holes, broken balconies, fractured butments, shattered casements, and a precipice near the western angle, from which, when the castle had been stormed and taken, numbers of the Mexican garrison had thrown themselves, and were crushed to death.

The grand aqueduct draws its aliment at the foot of the hill, from a large, square tank of spring water—so pure, so very pure, that in looking down its almost unfathomable depths, one is apt to mistake the calm, clear fluid for the very air he breathes. It was near this spot where is shown a noble cypress “that circles in the grain five hundred rings of years,” beneath whose “giant bole” “the slight she slips of loyal blood” were wont to gambol before the Aztec Sybarite, Montezuma; where “Malinche’s shade” is still seen to flit amid the grove, seeking her gallant lover, Cortez; and where, at a less remote period, Yankee riflemen strewed the ground with Mexican corpses, until the spreading trees were covered to the knees with blood-stained clay.

While gazing down the crystal reservoir, we resolved, in emulation of the Indian monarch, to test its virtues, and, in a moment, we were plunging and splashing in the icy water. It was, apart from the associations connected with brown Indian divinities, the very seventh Heaven of a bath; but whether we sullied the pellucid clearness of the aqueduct’s tribute, or detracted from the cooling fragrance of the celestial mint-juleps drained in town, we never had leisure to enquire; and indeed without caring a drop about the matter, we mounted our tall steeds, broke branches from the legendary tree, and passing through the kingly forest

and meadow beyond, entered the deserted walls of Molino del Rey.

As I have heretofore observed, this building fills the south side of the square—a sort of irregular barrack of two stories, and some eight hundred feet in length. Directly fronting this structure, at the distance of a few hundred yards, standing upon a very slight swell of the plain, is what was termed the *Casa mata*—a small redoubt—ditched and flanked by trenches, standing angularly in the direction of the windmill. It was the spot where our troops suffered severely, where many undaunted soldiers fell, under a murderous fire of artillery and musketry; and where, after being repulsed, the Mexicans left their entrenchments, and put the wounded and dying to death in cold blood. This was the reason why so small a number of prisoners were taken at the storming of Chapultepec!

Leaving Molino del Rey, we made a short tour of the environs, and returned again by the main Paseo! It was the hour when most frequented. There were but few ladies, and they not of the handsomest. Lots of queer antique coaches went rumbling along, and vastly neat cabs and stylish barouches whirling past them—while showy, spirited Mexican barbs, covered with gold and silver trappings were capering and prancing, five hundred steps to the minute—then an American General and staff would sweep by, elegantly mounted on high-mettled chargers, the small horses of the natives appearing like pigmies in comparison—and again along the grassy roadside paths were little children astride large sheep, completely caparisoned with saddles, housings, and bridles, trotting away quite gaily with their innocent young burthens. We took a glance at all this, and giving spur, rode into the city.