

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE day previous to my departure from Mexico, I called at the Bureau of Postes for a license, and made a report of what I considered collusion betwixt the Ladrons and Cochero, near Querétaro. The office was conducted by Mexicans; and the Administrador, quite a gentleman,—who excused his servants at some length, by stating that the causes which prevented them from disobeying the orders of the highwaymen were fears of subsequent punishment, in case of escape at the time. Moreover, in the present unsettled state of the country, crime had never been so prevalent, in consequence of the few troops at the disposal of the authorities, for the purpose of keeping the roads open, from the hordes of deserters who mostly composed these lawless bands; and even in the immediate vicinity of Mexico itself, highway robberies and murder were of daily occurrence. I was not convinced, although silenced, by the plausible courtesy of the Administrador.

Early on the morning of the 26th of May, I shook hands with my kind army friends, newly capped pistols, and vaulted into the saddle. *Estámos listos*—all right—said the post guide, as he succeeded in tightening the circingles, by kicking the beasts under the belly—*Vámanos*. Pulperias and tiendas were being opened; lepéros taking their morning's dram of *pulque*; closely veiled faces and sombre gowns were moving to mass; patrols of horse

and foot, returning drowsily to barracks; markets thronged; jackasses trumpeting their morning's note of thanksgiving, and the great city awaking again into hum and bustle; while, as the sun was climbing over the white-robed volcanoes that looked down upon the beautiful valley, we passed the long lines of streets and garita, gained the main road, when our pace quickened, and on we hurried along the branching shade of the avenues. Pell mell we went through droves of mules, at times driving a group of perverse donkeys right and left with the impetus of a catapult—maybe, one or more over, in a smoke from their own cargoes of charcoal, wood, or vegetables;—and long before the arrieros could right the little brutes on their legs, with *arrés* and blows—in readiness to treat us with curses—we had swept by in our heedless flight, unmindful of all; my guide scrupulously consoling himself by asserting that a government *extraordinario* had the privilege to knock over everybody that intercepted the path. In an hour we had left canals, streams, bridges, causeways, and fertile fields of the lovely *vega*, and turning to the right the bluff hill closed upon the scene—and this was my latest glimpse of Mexico.

Soon leaving the main road, we branched off by narrow bridle paths, and cross cuts of the post route: four relays, and as many fresh guides, carried me to a place called Tepetitlan. Here the horse purveyor was a woman, who declared, with an ireful voice and gesture, as I drew up before her tenement, “that the blessed virgin might send her to purgatory if she had a horse with a hoof to stand on—that I might report her to the Alcalde or the devil, or both, or go there myself, just as I pleased.” *Que mi importa?*—what do I care? And the director had no right to send three expresses in one week, when she had nothing

but the old grey and the mare! *Ave Maria! pues!*—so help yourself! Cracking my whip a little savagely, I crossed the verdant slope of a hill, and dismounted at the gate of a walled garden, having, a delapidated and venerable habitation within. I was decoyed thither by a brace of buxom damsels—mother and daughter—who, perceiving my distress, despatched an old cripple in search of beasts.

The little town had much to recommend it; the houses were very quaint and antiquated, strewn, as they might be, upon the sides of a grassy slope—with a crumbling stone bridge and rapid brawling river coursing at the base. Midway between was a large old church, ivy-grown from the ruined towers and belfry to the decayed buttresses and lintels of the doorway; all around the front were broad flights of stone steps, leading from the declivities of the hill, down to a level amphitheatre-like space, which was filled with glorious old trees, creeping vines, bright green grasses, ranges of marble benches beneath the shade, and in the midst, a thread of a rill, plashing about the ruins of what once had been the bowl of a large fountain.

Besides the picturesque charms of the village, I was recompensed for two hours delay, by the frolicsome Señoras, at whose estate I had tarried. They very obligingly prepared me a nice little repast of frijoles—fried eggs and tortillas—assisted me to drink a flask of bordeaux, and entertained me the while with a narrative of how the horrible Yankees had entered their great city—for they were cockneys, these ladies, and merely rusticiating at their retreat—and their dreadful fears, and the horror they would undergo in case the invasion extended to Tepetiltan. My guide, who had been industriously eating a bowl of beans, using an original spoon like to a diminutive scoop—made in a jiffy from

his tortillas—and swallowing beans and spoon at every mouthful, thereby putting himself to the trouble of reconstructing another at each succeeding bite—he, I say, informed my good hostesses that I was one of those *demonios Yankees*. *Ay! dios!* said the elder; *es posible que ud es gringo?*—can it be true that you are a green-horn? *Si amiga*, I responded. Then their curiosity was interested to know my destination, religious impressions, and so forth—if I was a *herege*? And being assured that I was a Christian catholic, could make the cross, and name more saints than they could, their good humor returned, and we made the old trees merry with laughter, chatting away the hours, seated upon the velvet sward. Still there appeared no indication of horses, and when beginning to despair, an individual saluted us, and I noticed him privately telegraphing my guide as to the probable amount the *gringo* could be cheated! when turning to me, with a resolute air, he exclaimed, *Tengo caballos hasta Tida a ocho pesos cada uno!* This was a triple extortion, but, very much to his astonishment, I immediately closed the bargain: upon which, he darted a disappointed look upon his coadjutor, in not having been signalized to charge more, and then drew forth his beasts from behind the garden wall. I had to be cheated, and there was no necessity of losing one's temper. I kissed the ladies—I say it with modest pride—and pursued my route.

I came on smoothly and peaceably the remainder of the day and during the night, until towards daybreak, when, to keep my eyes open, I took a refreshing dip in the little river Tula. On attempting to mount again, accidentally placing a hand on the horse's rump, he very unceremoniously struck me with both heels on the thigh. I was hurled some yards, and fell senseless. My guide dragged me again to the stream, and I suppose his novel

mode of treatment had the happy effect of restoring me to animation; for I partly recovered consciousness with my head beneath the water, in what I thought the last struggles of strangulation. It was meant, however, in kindness; and fortunately having a flask of strong muscal in the *alfor gas*, he bathed me, inside and out, to my great relief, although I was obliged to lay on a serapa by the road side, in sharp pain, for two hours. Then exchanging my vicious brute with the guide, he assisted me into the saddle again, and we walked quietly into the town of San Juan del Rio—not, however, without passing a body of sixteen deserters from our own army, in full uniform—who seemed to wish to be more sociable than I judged civil—and I was right glad to hear the last of their reiterated *adios*.

At San Juan, a large *donceur* procured magnificent horses for myself and a small urchin, who was sent as post-boy; after being again chafed with spirits, I mounted, and with a swollen, painful leg, left the town. The animal I bestrode moved with a spirited though easy gait, and nothing transpired for some miles. For easier travelling we had taken the main road, which traversed a level, well-cultivated country, hedged on either side with close plantations of the cactus and argave. It was about nine o'clock, when my little companion called attention to three horsemen, who, most unaccountably, had started up within an hundred yards of our rear: *Hay mala gente*—they are bad fellows—he softly exclaimed. They were well mounted, and like most other Mexicans on the road, had the lower portions of the face bound around with colored handkerchiefs, and notwithstanding the extreme mildness, not to say warmth of the morning, were closely wrapped in serapas. I must confess seeing naught remarkable in all this; for the country was open; apparently

well travelled; shortly before, we had passed a large drove of pack mules, and a *hacienda* was visible in the distance. Still I did not neglect the hint of my sharp young guide, and bade him make sail ahead. He needed no second bidding—gave a terrified look back, and struck spurs to his beast. Waiting a little while, I, too, increased my speed, but had not made a dozen bounds, when a loud voice called me to halt! What for? said I, without pausing. *Su passaporta*, was shouted. Pulling a heavy rifle-pistol from the holster, and bringing my horse to a stand, I replied, "Here's my passport!"

They instantly checked their animals, within twenty yards, threw off serapas, and whilst the individual nearest me was rapidly unrolling a cloth from the lock of his short carbine, believing hostilities to have commenced, I took deliberate aim, and fired. He was sitting diagonally towards me, and the ball, of nearly an ounce in weight, struck him high up the chest; and I venture to assert, upon the well-known virtues of Mons. Devisme's weapons, on the boulevards Poissonnerie, that it went through and through him. I saw his carbine fall to the ground, and heard him exclaim, with both hands pressing the breast, *Madre de Dios!* I myself was of the opinion, that the sooner he said his prayers the better, and although I felt a twinge of regret at what had taken place, it was speedily dissipated; for at the same moment there were three or four reports—two of them from persons on foot, inside the hedge; but not hearing even the whistling of the bullets, I judged their aim had been somewhat inaccurate. Giving my horse the rein and spur, I went flying along the road. One of the mounted gentlemen alone followed in pursuit, and finding I had the heels of him, I held my nag well in, until I had disengaged the remaining weapon, when, halting suddenly, I cried, *Venga mi*

compadre, para el cambio—come and take your revenge. The instant of perceiving the movement, he fired a pistol at random, shouted *puñetero!*—wheeled rapidly into the thickets, and was out of sight. He was at too great a distance to make sure of him, or I certainly should have saved the *garotte* a wrench. The old adage preserved him: *El diablo siempre cuida por los suyos*—the devil regards his darlings. Once more giving my willing beast the bit, I never ceased running for five leagues; as for my leg, I had forgotten all about it. Overtaking the little guide, we slackened our pace. But the trouble was not ended, for presently the diligence came in sight, and as we approached, what was my surprise and dismay, to observe an individual on the box deliberately level a blunderbuss at my head, and never remove his aim until the coach was lost to view! *Bueno!* thought I; this is diverting—first to shoot a thief, and then be mistaken for one!

Dismounting at a small *pulperia*, near an extensive *hacienda*, I bathed my lame limb in muscal, and reloaded the pistol; during which last operation, the patron of the grog-shop, who looked something villanous in the visage, interrogated the boy, who afterwards informed me that the wounded rogue on the black horse was one Señor Felipe, an intimate friend of the *pulperia*-man, and greatly respected by the community at large. I was not again molested, and experienced no further interruption. Three posts carried us to Querétaro late in the afternoon. Meeting Mons. Ribaud in the streets, I related the adventure, and he strongly advised me not to make it known, as there was no calculating the number of Don Felipe's associates, or the annoyance one might suffer from the sharp thrust of a knife, unexpectedly dealt by noon or midnight. Subsequently I was introduced to an English gentleman, who had been robbed the

day previous in the diligence—who stated, that, as there chanced to be a German mechanic in the coach, the *compadres* mistook him for a Yankee, and very promptly blew his brains out—which little incident made me feel highly gratified that a like interesting episode had not been enacted with mine own.

I reported my arrival to the American Commissioners, and took quarters with the officers attached to the escort. They entered the city on the 25th, as the vote upon the Treaty was being taken in the Mexican Senate: very possibly it may have hastened it. The division stood but four in opposition—much excitement prevailed in Querétaro, as the measure was decidedly unpopular among all classes of military men; there being no less than twenty-seven hundred officers of the army, besides immense swarms of *empleados* and every species of Government people, awaiting the action of Congress. It was universally conceded by liberal-minded persons, that the old army should be completely disbanded, and regenerated on a smaller scale; but still they kept up the cry of War! War! without the slightest means in men, money, or material, to carry it on; merely as a watchword to frown down reform, without the merest hope or wish to do any more fighting or running—idle words and wind, and thus the *gritos* of *Viva la guerra! Abajo la paz!* were yelled in every street and plaza.

The battalion of traitors, under the banner of San Patricio, who amounted to some hundreds, had very judiciously been withdrawn from the city before the coming of the American troops. Strong guards of Mexican cavalry were posted throughout the town to prevent any disturbance, since the entrance of the escort had been strenuously opposed by the Ministry, but with the exception of a few stones thrown at the Commissioners' empty

coaches, on driving to the stables, and a corporal's guard of our Riflemen charging and clearing a street—for some real or fancied insult—no collision took place.

Our soldiers were quartered in a large, commodious church on the skirts of the city, and strong guards daily detailed for duty at the residences of their officers. They were a splendid body of cavalry, and deservedly elicited a deal of admiration from natives and foreigners. We were lodged in two spacious houses facing the principal street—the Ministers with their numerous attachés in one, and the officers adjoining. Each edifice was big enough for a regiment. Our receiving and sleeping saloon was all in one, and a fine lofty hall it was, with capital balconies in front.

We passed the time very pleasantly. There were nice baths in the vicinity, where we laved before breakfast. We devoted the mornings to walking, or lounging over the wide balconies, where, from dawn till dark, an audience of near a thousand leperos and vagabonds, were thickly seated on the opposite sides of the street, regarding with marked attention our minutest proceedings. Within a few minutes walk was a circular promenade, closely planted with undergrowth and towering foliage, where in the afternoons all the world assembled to behold their enemies, *Los gringos*.

One morning I had the pleasure of accompanying the commanding officer of the escort and his officers on an official visit to the military Governor of the town. He entered the saloon, very like Harlequin, after we all were seated. He was a little man; and as the doors swung open, in he bounded with open arms, and bowing most gracefully to his visitors. He was not in uniform; and his only military insignia were a number of ribbons and decorations on the breast of his coat. He had received a ball through the

cheek at the battle of Buena Vista, which was carefully concealed beneath a luxuriant growth of whiskers. The conversation was not very general, and remaining but a brief sitting, we made our salaams; upon which I could not resist complimenting the Major at his excessive grace whilst outbowing the General, and he assured me that he had even injured the King of Naples' spine, who attempted to surpass him in the business!

From here we repaired, to attend one of our Commissioners on another official visit, to the Mexican President and Ministers. The reception-room was rather a mean apartment, hung with crimson curtains, and at the upper end was a chair of state, with others ranged around. The President, Peña y Peña, pleased me more than his advisers, having a mild, benignant expression, and evidently appeared worn down with care and anxiety. Anaya was a tall, bony person, with high cheek-bones—denoting his Indian origin—and a stolid striped face. Rosa, the Secretary of War, was short in stature, of swarthy complexion, with full, dark, intelligent eyes. But of all the public characters, who held office under the Mexican government, whom I had the opportunity of seeing, there was none who struck me so forcibly as one of the deputies—Señor Cauto.

At the conclusion of the Presentation, a number of polite speeches were interchanged, all of which impressed me as being very gracefully done, though destitute of a particle of sincerity, as these empty-headed formalities usually are. But indeed I felt for the pitiable position of these poor Mexicans, who were having bitter pills crammed down their throats, though gilded by so many sweet, courteous compliments; and I was glad when the audience terminated, and we had turned our backs on the miserable, cowed-looking sentinel at the gate.

The officers of the escort received many civilities from the Mexicans, and extended others in return. The Governor had obligingly furnished a full colonel, who was an excellent cicerone about the city, who ordered dinners, assisted in eating them, and made himself generally useful: he bore a surprising resemblance to the portraits of Don Quixote. On one occasion we had a call from a colonel of cavalry: a large, fine-looking fellow, flashing resplendent in gold, from the glittering plates of his fur shako, to the richly-chased scabbard of his sabre, and rowels of his bright spurs;—he must have been worth a fortune as he stood! It was his wish that all the American officers would honor him at a breakfast preparing for the occasion. The invitation was cheerfully accepted, as much, possibly, in compliment to the dashing colonel, as to the fact that our own board was not so well supplied as was altogether palatable and proper.

It was quite a grand affair—was the breakfast—laid out in the billiard-saloon of a fonda, having the bar and cooking convenient, as it were, in the same apartment; there were some twenty Mexican officers at table, besides ourselves; to say nothing of as many more casual observers, who aided vociferously in drinking all the toasts in succession, and afterwards carefully secreted the glasses—which were limited—in readiness for another toast. The first course consisted simply of a wine-glass of pure cogniac—intended for an appetizer no doubt—but it was probably subversive of the desired effect, for I noticed, immediately afterwards, a number with watery eyes, and great difficulty of articulation. This was followed by a pilau of rice and chickens, beefsteaks, soups, frijoles, fruit, and viands in the most indiscriminate confusion. Bordeaux and sherry circulated freely, and we had speeches, toasts, and sentiments: we drank the memory of every

general, living or dead, of both armies, beginning with Washington and Hidalgo, and gave, I should imagine, upon a rough calculation, as many as eighty or ninety cheers for Santa Anna, and “Skote!” I had the happiness of translating—rather freely I must confess—these different effusions, and also the sense of a long harangue delivered by an advocate, who came late, and for that reason got comfortably *boracho* at once.

Our gallant host, in a few disjointed observations, assured us that he was not only brave himself, and loved bravery in others, but that his horse was brave, and had been wounded in divers battles. *Yo soy valiente!* said the fierce colonel, pounding the orders on his capacious breast, and forthwith proclaimed to the audience his intention to pay for everything that anybody could possibly eat or drink for a fortnight to come, and seizing me by the arms, he impressively remarked that I was the most intimate friend he ever had except his wife, and requested me to throw his huge shako up to the ceiling—solely for *amistad*, and good fellowship of the thing—which I instantly did, and made the bearskin and golden plates ring against the rafters. Thereupon he called for more wine, and desired all who loved him to break a few glasses, commencing himself with a couple of decanters. At this stage of the action the landlord interfered, and very sensibly cut off the supplies of liquor, which reduced the party, who were “merry in the halls,” to consistent behavior; when, embracing one another frequently, horses were ordered for a turn in the Alameda. They treated us with the greatest kindness and hospitality, only the manner of doing it was different from our own. All were decorated, and one handsome young officer of the Lancers had four emblems of defeated battles.

The Paseo was thronged by all the élite of Querétaro: richly-

caparisoned barbs were jingling musically with multitudes of little steel or silver drops attached to the housings; pacing, and fretting, and foaming, full of fire and spirit, but curbed and trained to short steps. Then came the well-appointed carriages of the President or Governor, drawn by sleek fat mules, and close behind cumbrous masses of timber—hewn wheels and axles lashed together with hides—all hitched by ropes to half a dozen, or more, dirty beasts; the vehicles themselves filled with rare specimens of fat old women, decked off in gay haberdashery, each holding an armful of children, all bent upon a good sight of the North Americans. And there were youthful faces too—bright glances from brighter eyes—emulating those aged matrons in curiosity, peering from behind waving fans, within long lines of carriages drawn up at the sides of the promenade. Nor had the *Gringos* aught to fear from the investigation, for there were handsome young dragoons and riflemen, attended by their orderlies, mounted on noble chargers with arched necks and shining coats, moving with a high, proud bearing, as if regarding with great contempt the capering graces of their little brethren beside them.

After a number of turns around the park—the last at a thundering gallop, with a stride that made the natives shudder—we dashed out of the gates. On our way through the city, one of our Mexican friends espied me, and in true Californian style, shook his bridle, gave spur, and came leaping like a flash towards us. I was not a novice at the sport, and touching one of the finest horses in the army with my heel, the gallant sorrel sprang forward to greet him. We met in full career, my charger stood like the great pyramid, but the shock rolled my antagonist into the street. I should in courtesy have got down from the saddle to his assistance, but reflecting that without a ladder I never

should be able to get on my high steed again, I accordingly remained quiet. However, my friend quickly remounted, and made an earnest attempt to laugh; but as there chanced to be hundreds of spectators, I hardly thought the mirth reached his heart: he may have been somewhat allegro from the good cheer at breakfast, or have eaten something indigestible, yet under either dispensation, it will caution him not to run another joust at a Kentucky-bred charger, or he may, as in this instance, get tilted from the saddle. Being a sailor, I gained a great reputation for this feat, and gave an entertainment on the strength of it.

Some days elapsed after the Treaty had finally been acted upon in the Mexican Senate, before the ratifications were exchanged. Mexican diplomacy is proverbial, and they chose the most tortuous track to gain the goal. The delay was in some degree attributable, so said the Government, to the absence of the official seal, and certain time required to make proper copies and translations; but it was with equal reason surmised, that it arose from causes relative to a division of the first instalment of the indemnity, as a new ministry was to be elected, and the old cared not to assume the odium of signing the Peace, without being fortified with the assurances of their successors that they should receive the reward of their services. But here subterfuge was unavailing—the armistice expired on the 2d of June, and time was flying. At length, after refusing permission for the American cavalry and artillery to take up their line of march by land to the Northern frontier, on the night of the 30th of May, the final signatures were affixed to the Treaty, and an hour later, Herrera was chosen President of the Republic.

Soon after midnight, with a copy of this document in my jacket, and a promise, from the Secretary of War, of an escort for ten leagues, I once more began my journey towards the Pacific Ocean.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was quite dark on taking my place in the diligence, but getting comfortably seated, I heard one of the passengers inquire if there was to be an escort; so putting my head out of the window, I asked my man Juan if he had any idea where the troops were concealed? *No Señor, no hay!*—not a soul to be seen. *Bueno!* I consoled myself by being sure of meeting them at the garita—and then we came to the gate, but never a sabre visible! Malditos were of no avail. Señor Rosa, in a multiplicity of *negocios*, had forgotten me! Truly, I was scared out of sleep the first few posts, but at last my eyelids gained the day—I sailed away in the land of dreams, and never awoke until reaching Salamanca—much refreshed and decidedly happy not to have been rifled by ladrons.

It was four o'clock and raining heavily as we drove into the cellar, as it were, of the sky-built city of Guanajuato. The water was bounding and leaping down the naked sides of the hills, converting every narrow gully into a boiling torrent, until cascades and rivulets all poured into the deep valley beneath, and went roaring and foaming away, increasing in bulk and impetuosity at every gorge, to feed some rapid river in the plains beyond. I was intently occupied speculating upon the chances whether