

drew bridles at Istlan. Having no further need of the post administrador, or the services of his *vivo* mule, I sought the public meson. Here were seated under the portals a select group of politicians, listening to, and commenting upon an article in an old newspaper, read with much emphasis by a dirty jacketless person, with a head so large, and buried so deeply between his shoulders, as to bear a close resemblance to a turtle. *Señor*, said he, as I dismounted, rising with a graceful gesture, "the good patron of the inn is away; the caballero who addresses you is the well known *licenciado* Don Augustin Jarano—*criado de vd*: What can be done for you? that is a noble animal you bestride; he is tired! beat out—dead! You will profit by an exchange—my friend, here," winking to one of his auditors, "has an angel of a beast—*tiene sobre pasos*—has a gait like a lady—paces! and has refused two ounces—*eh! no! quarante douros*—forty hard dollars!" *Buño*, I replied, much to the horror of my guide, who began to think the sharp advocate was going to become the owner of the pinto. After a world of tugging and struggling a miserable spavined nag was pulled from a corral to the patio, and secured to a post. Waiting until the praises of this *muy bueno cavallo*—this fine steed—had been fully sounded, I made them a prompt offer of six rials for him as he stood!—when, finding the gringo was not to be so easily jockeyed, they declared he was not worth half the money, and we became warm friends at once. I tarried an hour, discussing the right of church taxation; when Cypriano, having had a fowl grilled, a bowl of frijoles, bread, and country wine, snugly stowed in the *alforgas*, I informed my acute acquaintances that I was bound to Guadajajara, bid them adios, and after skirting the pretty town, turned to the opposite direction. It is always advisable in

Mexico while travelling, to avoid if possible public places, and keep the destination secret; for the *compadres*—highwaymen—are often in collusion with people about mesons and derive information of the guests from those sources.

Striking a path on the banks of a pretty stream, we shortly found a secluded nook, beneath a scrub olive-tree, where the beasts were bathed, fed, and picketed in the rich grasses, when we did much the same, and took a comfortable siesta beside them.

Towards evening resuming the journey, a few leagues carried us to Aguacatlan; to preserve the strength of our animals for a thirty leagues' travel on the morrow, I concluded to remain until daylight. The spacious fonda was filled with guests, and I made the acquaintance of an agreeable young Irishman, from Tepic. In an adjoining room there was a large family of señoritas, convoyed by a venerable matron and servants. They were very chatty and amiable while sitting in the patio in front of their domicile; so much so, in fact, that the señora became suspicious, and, as my Milesian companion remarked, "*corral'd* the donçellas too early in the evening." The duenna had no compassion for bachelors, and we saw no more of their fluttering white dresses and ribosas; though we could hear them frolicking and shouting in great glee, which was very provoking, as windows there were none, and Spanish bolts and portals being famous for strength and solidity, we were obliged to relinquish any further hope of their charming society.

It was getting late, old Cypriano was sitting at my door, enveloped in a serapa, giving no signs of life, save the occasional reluming of the cigarillo, like a dim glow-worm, betwixt his teeth. The honest fellow needed rest, and saying *Buños noches*

I threw myself upon the brick bedstead, with saddle for pillow, and was soon asleep.

Before sunset on the following afternoon, my gallant little beast galloped bravely into Tepic, and I was again made quite at home with Mr. Bissell. A vessel was awaiting me at San Blas, but the passage being a tedious one to Mazatlan by sea, I concluded to pursue the land route along the coast to the latter port, on the following night, and accordingly called on General Aristi, who endorsed my passport, and I then took a post license. I was sorry to discharge my faithful old guide, Cypriano, but a liberal donation, and present of the *pinto* served to lessen our mutual grief. He still hung about the court-yard, jealous of the attentions shown me by others, and buckling on my spurs, affectionately pressed my legs at parting.

I rode about Tepic, with a young Englishman, who was handsome enough to drive all the women in town distracted. The city has not the air of stir and bustle, like other places of note in the interior, nor is it so well built; it has charms, however, in quietude, in verdant fields, the fertility of its lovely plain, its swift streams, long lines of gardens, all looking as if calmly cradled in the arms of the giant sierras that encircle it.

The rainy season was approaching, and whilst we were bathing in the little rush and mat-built cabins by the river, the first shower fell—there were numbers of ladies and children beneath the leafy frames, which only served for shelter a moment, and at last, in desperation, groups of them sallied out for a run to the town; the effort was ineffectual, the gusts of wind and rain drove them back, with light dresses completely saturated, and clinging to round pretty limbs only more exposed in efforts to conceal them. Our gallant offers

of assistance were all in vain, they only screamed and laughed the louder the nearer we advanced; thus on the wet grass they reclined, and remained in the heavy rains until servants returned with shawls and wrappers, when, with many a light laugh and flashing glance, they ran across the plain.

Although prepared to leave Tepic at midnight, the rain was violent and darkness too black to begin the journey. Towards daylight, with guide and postboy, and closely buttoned *armas*, of skin leggings, with faces turned from the tempest, we made the attempt. We had not proceeded much beyond the city, when the roads became so exceedingly slippery over a clayey soil, and our progress so tedious and dangerous, that we dismounted at a rancho, and were compelled to remain until near noon. By this time the heaviest clouds had apparently squeezed themselves dry, and under light droppings we again pushed on and commenced descending very gradually from the grand plateau towards the Tierra Caliente below. This I did not accomplish without having my steed to fall with me, but luckily escaped injury, the saddle bearing the brunt of the shock, and a broken stirrup saving my leg and foot from a like mishap. We reached the low lands within eight leagues of San Blas, and found a disagreeable contrast in the dry heat, from the salubrious atmosphere above.

Changing horses and rapid riding brought us to the main trunk of the Rio Grande, when embarking with our saddles and gear, in broad canoes, we were ferried to the opposite bank at Santiago. The river is wide, rapid and muddy. Small houses of rushes extended from the banks, and hundreds of people were washing or bathing within them.

The town appeared to have been visited with a heavy shower of water-melons; I had never before seen such quantities. In

front of every house there were pyramids five feet high, like racks of shot in an ordnance yard; every man, woman and child had their heads immersed to the ears in huge fragments; even cattle, swine and dogs were at work, and the river, too, was covered with seeds and rinds. It was not surprising, that under such a novel dispensation, there was delay in procuring horses; to pass my time I supplied myself with a huge green monster of its species, engaged a little shed of rushes, and cooled my limbs in the tepid waters, which last feat did not in the least shock the modesty of an ancient *planchadora*—washerwoman—who carried on her occupation quite unconcernedly beside me.

Under lash and spur away we went in great good humor, but had not gone a league, when I waxed exceeding wroth on discovering that some watchful thief had stolen three ounces from my hat while bathing—it was too late to return, and we consigned him to his just deserts. The roads were perfectly level, dry and sandy; at times we scented the ocean air, borne along by the regular sea breeze, and the atmosphere was filled with knats and mosquitoes, that by no means enlivened the journey. The vegetation had changed, and we passed for leagues through groves of tapering palm trees, broad-leafed bananas, rank vines and vegetation. Forging the Rio San Pedro, we traversed the little towns of Rosa Morada and Buena Vista, thence over the Rio Caña to Acaponeta. The river was a clear, shallow stream, and had not yet been swollen or turbid by the freshets near its source above. We had ridden all night, and sending my mozo to the town, with the post boy who had suffered severely from the sting of an *alacran*, a venomous scorpion, I remained to bathe and put on my other shirt.

During the entire trip to and from Mexico, I found that by

eating sparingly of light food, smoking less, and laving constantly, I could endure almost any amount of fatigue, with but an hour or two of sleep in the twenty-four; a few paper cigarillos was all the extraneous stimulant I indulged in while on the road.

Acaponeta is a hot little town, half built of mud, with a spacious rural-like square, shaded by fine trees, and boasting of a quaint old church. It is but a few leagues from the ocean, surrounded by a sandy soil, which however, under the sun's fierce rays, over all the Tierra Caliente, produces quantities of tropical plants: the cassava for meal, bananas and guavas, with melons and many kinds of fruit. The inhabitants of these secluded districts, living in little worlds of their own, free from care or war, regardless of the political revolutions so continually agitating the mother country, seem to enjoy the *dolce far niente* in its truest sense. They are too poor to excite the rapacity of the government; their land yields almost spontaneously all means of subsistence; they live in mud cabins or bamboo huts, through whose light lattice-work of reeds or trellis, the sea breeze cools them during the languid siesta; then at the fiesta or fandango, the women, in white muslin camizettas and gaily striped basquinas, with gilt baubles, perhaps, thrust through their black locks, attended by the men, whose only wealth consists of horse, saddle, spurs and serapa—dance, game and drink until the fiesta is ended, with no fears of interruption save what lies in the sharp steel of their mercurial cuchillos—ignorant and unenvious of all around them.

I found my guide in the Plaza, and walked into a white building on a corner, purporting to be a *Fonda y Billar*. It was Sunday morning, besides some notable feast day; a little old spider-legged uneven billiard table was thronged by rakish blades, with

little miniature nine pins stuck in the centre of the cloth, which were being rapidly knocked down by the players; a pulperia was close at hand, and the chink of *copitas*, filled with agudiente or muscal, was keeping a musical accompaniment to the click of the billiard balls. The patron was an active, portly person, and from his clean, natty attire and huge beard, with a certain sea roll to his gait, I correctly surmised that he had "sailed the broad ocean," or that he might have been a retired pirate. He received me very hospitably, ordered a lithe black-eyed little girl of ten years not to go to the Iglesia until *El Capitan* had made a breakfast, and pointing to a bedstead in the sala, upon which was tightly stretched a side of dressed leather, desired me to repose until he could procure horses.

From my position I had a clear view around the Plaza—crowds of gaily-dressed paisanos were moving from house to house, or thronging the bough-built booths and little shops, all strewed beneath the lofty trees, sipping dulces, making purchases, eating fruit, smoking or gaming. Presently the large bell began tolling for high mass; like magic, at the first stroke of the iron tongue, traffic ceased, the *monté* was discontinued, the dealer putting by money and cards; half eaten fruit was thrown upon the ground, children ceased squalling, caracolling steeds were reined sharply back by riders crossing the square, the noise of balls and glasses in the Billar and Tienda was silenced, hats were reverently doffed, cigarillos dropped, and the hum and murmur of many voices had passed away. Then, as the little chimes with noisy throats were bursting forth in clanging peals, the whole concourse of persons that filled the plaza went moving with uncovered heads, sombreros in hand, toward the church, and now the organ rose in solemn strains, embers were swinging, multitudes of tapers were

twinkling within the nave, like stars in the firmament, while hundreds were kneeling in piety and awe before the shrines they worshipped. In no portion of the world can there be found more true respect for religion or real reverence, than in some parts of Mexico, and the truthfulness and simplicity with which they conduct the beautiful ceremonials of the catholic church, is not a flattering commentary upon the indifferent professions of more enlightened countries.

In witnessing this impressive scene, I sighed to become a convert, and indeed I felt convinced that if I had had the persuasive lips exerted for my conversion, that pertained to the penserosa face and Murillo eyes of my host's graceful little daughter, I should have thrown away the sword for the cross on the spot. She was standing with half raised eyes, and an impatient expression, wondering very naturally, no doubt, why the gringo did not swallow the eggs and milk she had prepared by her sire's commands—*Quiere usted mas Señor?*—want anything else—she murmured, with a pretty, petulant frown; "No! no! *amigita!* mil *gracias*, forgive me for detaining you from the mass;" her face brightened joyously, and readjusting her little flowing ribosa, she tripped away to her devotions.

Horses were soon at the door, and passing beside the now-deserted booths and shade, we once more became exposed to the burning glare of the tropical sun. During the afternoon, light showers of rain chased us along the road—a great relief from breathing the light sandy dust of the parched soil; but as night came on, and our track led through interminable forests of sycamores, closely woven with thousands of creeping vines and parasitical plants, the very light and air were shut out, and what with myriads of stinging insects, heat and dust, I thought of never

surviving. Two hours past midnight we emerged from these sultry groves, and reached the village of Esquinapa, where, changing steeds, I was attended by an old post boy, named Tomas; and from the moment I unceremoniously disturbed his slumbers until we parted, he never ceased singing and rhyming. He would have made a character for Cervantes. Awakening with a couplet on his tongue, he followed it up by a trite Spanish proverb, hit off scores of doggerel, like an improvisatore, on my name, and, indeed, with his joyous, hearty old laughter, that acted like an epidemic in every scar and wrinkle of his fine bronzed face—with generous bonhomie and good humor, he kept me full of merriment the nine leagues we travelled; and I have only to regret, for my own satisfaction, not having noted some of his poetical sallies.

We gained the Rio Rosario before dawn, and halted between two channels, on a dry pebbly spot, where, throwing myself from the saddle, I plunged into the running water, and then, with a little mound of sand for a pillow, took the first half-hours sleep since leaving Tepic. At sunrise, old Tomas aroused me with a verse and song, and fording the remaining fork of the river, we entered Rosario. It is a place of some importance, with a number of substantial public buildings—internal custom house, a tobacco monopoly, and barracks for a military commandancia; in fact less provincial, more modernized with cafés, shops, sociedades, and well-constructed houses than any town of the Tierra Caliente, save Mazatlan. While awaiting a relay, I was regaled by the gentlemanly administrador of the Duana with a cup of delicious chocolate, and in turn favored him with late news from the capital.

Departing from Rosario, which is nearly thirty leagues from

the Port, I came on at a flying gallop to the old Presidio; then tarrying for breakfast with General Anaya, I again continued with all speed to Urias, where my horse's heels, and my own anxiety, outstripped the broken wind of the guide's, and I never drew rein before reaching the Marismas of Mazatlan. The tide was very high, and I was almost forced to swim; but encouraged by a cavalcade of gentlemen on the opposite shore, I struggled through, and was greeted by hosts of acquaintances, who, by mere accident and fun, had proposed to meet me on the road. I feel assured that I never shall be so handsomely escorted again; and what added to the éclat of my arrival was, that upon entering the crowded plaza a polite commissary ordered the band to play "Hail Columbia!" and I was nothing loth to hide my blushes, travel-stained garments, and jaded horse, from the admiring populace, and seek refuge within the residence of the Governor.

Thus terminated my rough notes and jolts in a Mexican saddle, after a journey of near twenty-five hundred miles, mostly on horseback; and the last one hundred and twelve leagues from Tepic performed in fifty-three hours, which was said to be the quickest trip on record. I was happy that the journey was finished; and although I experienced no subsequent fatigue, and my frame was much stronger, yet it is an undertaking that I should not be anxious to attempt again.

When a gentleman travels in Mexico, he goes provided with beds and baggage on pack mules, and half a dozen attendants at least, armed to the teeth, and ready to do battle when occasion requires. In my case it was different: at all times hurried, with at best but indifferent beasts—riding night and day together—never meeting a person on the roads without a mutual fumbling in the

holsters for pistols, not knowing whether in raising the hand to the *sombrero*, it is intended to salute or shoot you, as friend or foe; yet, the provinces of the Republic that I traversed were out of the beaten track of tourists, with portfolios and poodles—a country where one is *per force* obliged to rough it a little; and where in the first essay, as in my case, the novelty and excitement attending fresh scenes, varied scenery, strange forms, manners and habits, more than balanced the fatigue, insecurity and annoyances of the journey.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

My arrival happened on the 13th of June. The garrison had been very much strengthened, and a block-house was under construction near the estero, with the expectation of holding the town during the rainy season and bad weather, in the absence of force afloat. The news of the peace changed these plans, and preparations were commenced for evacuating the town.

My little post at the Garita had been relieved of its old garrison, and fallen into strange hands, so I took quarters with my good friend Don Guillermo and Señor Molinero, where we lounged all day in the cool patios, under the awnings, smoking away like Turks. Mazatlan was extremely gay, owing to the yearly festival that takes place on the *Olas Atlas*—a curving beach between two bluff promontories facing the ocean. I am ignorant if there be in the calendar a patron saint devoted to gamblers, or I should certainly believe that this jubilee was expressly dedicated to him.

There were a great number of bough and cane-built booths raised on the sandy promenade, all prettily draped with muslin and other light fabrics, each having a tasteful display of liquors and fruits, with little saloons screened off, and facing the sea, for either eating or gaming: further on were stout upright poles, firmly planted in the ground, supporting circularly swinging