

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE LOAN OF A MOZO, AND A TRIP TO PALOMAS.



THOUGHT I had heard of every loan known to man, even of the dire necessity of borrowing a broom, but to have reached the climax of borrowing a man-servant was a supreme pinnacle of glory, to which even the loftiest flights of my vanity had never hoped to soar.

No high words nor outspoken disagreement ever occurred between the departing servants and myself, but the fact began to dawn upon me that they did not intend that their Mexican customs should ever be engrafted upon my American tree of knowledge.

Without a murmur of complaint, in almost every instance, these meek-voiced, studiously polite *hombres* would inform me that sickness in their families required their immediate presence. If I ventured to ask where their families resided, their replies varied according to the state of the weather or their good will to me. Frequently the answer would be, in Guadalajara, Zacatecas, or San Luis Potosi, neither of which places was nearer than three hundred miles.

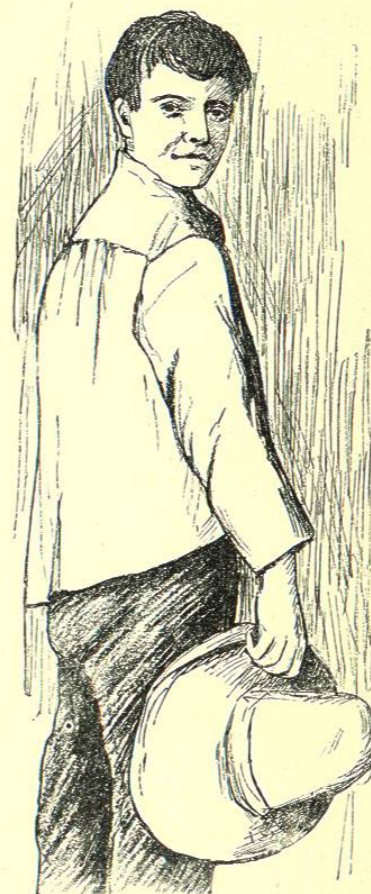
In time I came to observe every mood and gesture, and could generally detect, some days ahead, the indications of a contemplated departure. I remember Don Miguel Rodriguez, as he called himself, who was determined to go away so silently that I should not suspect his heartless intention.

He had given me the gratifying information that he had no family, but, as the event proved, my hold on him was no stronger for this circumstance. He now looked at me as if to say: "Well, now, Señora, you need not suppose that I do not understand your ways as

well as our own customs. You have had no fewer than twenty *mozos*, and while they have all left you without the least disagreement, I, Don Miguel Rodriguez, could explain all. I know why they have gone, but you don't. I am far ahead of you, poor ignorant *gringo*! Some day you'll know more than you do now!"

Each one in turn seemed to regret going, but at the same time showed plainly that my ideas of life and of the management of a household were far removed from his own. But without a note of warning, or an intimation of his purpose, Don Miguel took his hat in hand, turned his head across his shoulder, while the most cynical expression that could have been depicted on the face of a human being, or of a *mozo*, played about his eyes and mouth as I anticipated his movements, and awoke to the certainty that another faithful one had gone to join the band of invincibles.

The word *pues* is thrown in between sentences so generally, and has so many significations, such as, "well," "then," "therefore," "since," "surely," and many others, that it is not always easy for a stranger to settle the point. The servants, however, in pronouncing this word make an amusing abbreviation of it into "*pos*." And so it was that Miguel only said, "*Pos entonces yo me voy*" ("Well, now, I am going"), but his face and figure spoke volumes. I learned from each one of them in a different way, the hopelessness and folly of any attempt to



"WELL, NOW, I'M GOING."

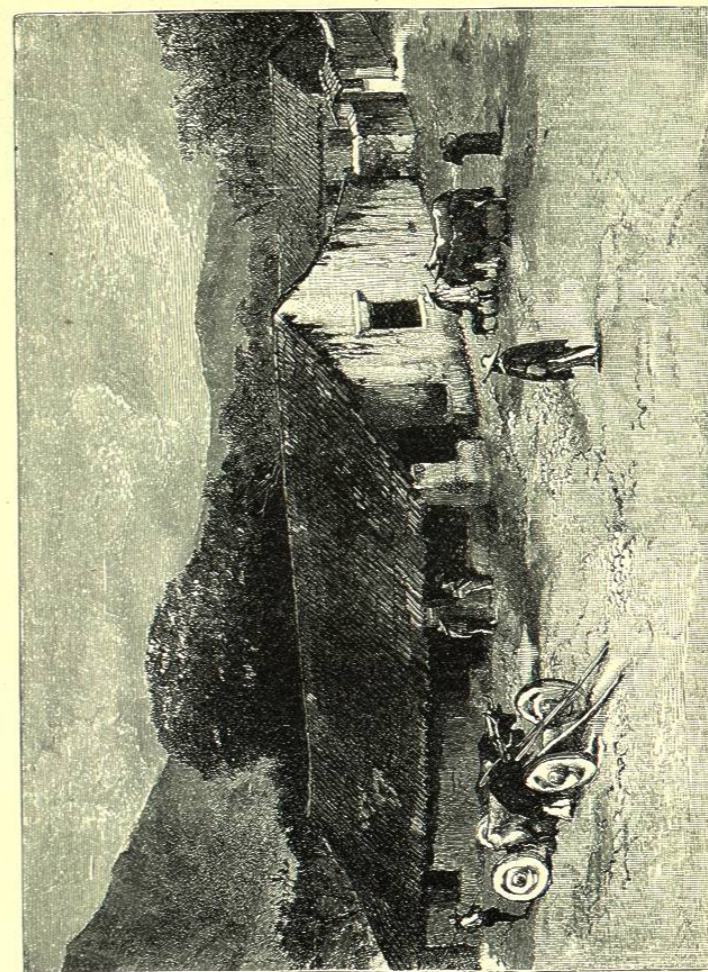
change their hereditary customs or invest them with new ideas. Good and faithful enough they were until the impression was fixed upon them, that they were losing their national "*costumbres*."

A gentleman who often visited our house, and who had been long a resident of the country, and who knew full well the importance of the *mozo*, and that the respectability of our household was at a low ebb without that all-important adjunct, kindly loaned us one of his trusties. Many times we were the recipients from him of this order of hospitality.

I used to think there could be no better opening for a good, paying business than for some enterprising Mexican to establish an employment bureau for *mozos*, and exact of them that their families reside in the same city.

Cosme, our borrowed *mozo*, was duly installed, with highly gratifying results. He was several degrees above the common herd, and more trusty than the best, having been trained by Doña Angelina, the wife of our friend. Cosme had a most benignant face, with an open, beaming countenance, and every duty he performed was done with the zeal and alacrity which had characterized no other *mozo*, within the range of my experience. The wish in my heart that took precedence of all others, at this time, was, that I should not be forced to the necessity of hearing from him that forever emphatic avowal which had ere now well-nigh crazed me, "*No es costumbre!*" I knew, if he once began, my peace of mind and happiness were gone.

To prevent it, every species of a now highly cultivated ingenuity was called to my assistance. The possibility began to haunt me like a grim specter. It was ever present day or night, awake or asleep. It never relinquished its hold upon my faculties. It was written on the wall, look where I would. It stalked up and down the street defiantly. It was astride every *burro*, and waved its hands at me, every turn I made in the house. My brain was on fire, my senses dazed. Where fly for relief? One could hope for a respite from the haunting custom officials, but this, all-pervading, deep-seated, and



A COUNTRY STORE.

irrepressible, had screwed its courage to the sticking-place and would not down. My only hope was in Cosme.

Things moved pleasantly enough for the first few days, in which Cosme charmed us by his kindness and watchfulness of the premises. I let him have his own way, about the manner in which his various labors were performed. I remained away from where he was, and not once had the dreaded expression fallen from his lips within my hearing, prior to our trip to Palomas. "The things which try people show what is in them." It so proved with Cosme.

Business called us to Palomas for a day. It was settled that we should go in a carriage drawn by a spirited pair of dark mahogany thorough-breds, which had never been known to let anything pass them but a *mozo*.

Cosme was up betimes on this particular morning. He was more nimble and ready than ever before, in contemplation of the pleasure of an airing in the country. He gave his own characteristic toilet many extra touches. He washed his face and combed his hair, and even borrowed the blacking, in order, as he said: "*Para dar negro a las botas*" ("black his boots"). So excited was he that he partook of little breakfast. The gray dawn silently melted into bright streaks of purple and amber, and the gorgeous rays of the sun threw a genial halo over the quiet city, as he made his happy preparations. When the *mozo* is promoted to the honor of an equestrian, his name changes to that of "*peon de estribo*" ("slave of the stirrup"). This will better describe Cosme's services on this occasion than to be known as simply a *mozo*. His was no ordinary service.

Custom requires the *mozo* to lead the way for vehicles, to look out for intruders, ward off interlopers, and to be on hand in case of accident. During long journeys, where the travelers camp out, or stop in *mésos*, the *mozo* goes ahead and arranges for the accommodation of the entire party. Not even a drive within the city limits, is contemplated without the *mozo* leading the way, although every route is thoroughly understood by the driver. He is to be relied upon in his representation as to the safety or expediency of any route or *mésos*.

On this particular morning we went all around our half of the castle, bolting and barring windows and doors, so that even a cat might not intrude during our absence.

A first-class riding horse of large size was scarce indeed, although



"PULQUE IN SHEEP-SKINS, FILLED EVEN TO THE FEET."

it was hard to find a really bad-looking one, for, owing to their Andalusian blood, they were all graceful and spirited. It had been our good fortune to procure a large, magnificent animal to be used solely for this purpose. His flowing tail touched the ground, and his mane was long and glossy. He was docile, and frequently ate sugar or salt from my hand. At a moderate speed his gait was easy and comfortable for the rider, but when urged to unusual

exertion, it became something terrible. This horse Cosme mounted. Never did *mozo* start out with prospects more flattering for a pleasant canter over the smooth roads, than did Cosme on that 18th day of September.

After passing through the narrow streets, our road lay for the most part across the usual Sahara-like expanse of country, only varied by the line of mountains on one hand, and on the other by several cotton factories, with their groves of cedar and other evergreens. They were not imposing, but by comparison with the neighboring monotony, to my tired eyes, were as interesting as the most famous castle on the Rhine.

Once or twice we passed strings of *burros*, overladen with marketable commodities—pulque in sheep-skins, filled even to the feet with the favorite beverage; also wood, stone for building purposes; and whole families of human beings were sometimes perched upon one of these weary animals.

By far the most charming sights were several beautiful mountain cascades which gushed at intervals from the rocks in clear streams of sparkling purity. Far up in the ledge of a precipice or declivity, a spring burst forth suddenly, then dropping in a glistening fall, broke away down the scraggy mountain side in a foaming cascade, and, having disported itself in a thousand lights and shapes of beauty, quietly gathered itself together, and flowed away, a musical murmuring brook.

But Cosme took heed to none of these agreeable interludes in the monotony, nor of the monotony

itself. He was otherwise engrossed. Intent upon keeping bravely in front of us, where custom had placed him, it became necessary for him to travel faster and faster, until his gallant steed was finally dashing along at the maddest possible rate. There was no restraining our fiery team, and, of course the faster they traveled the worse for poor Cosme. Oblivious to passing objects, the merciless animal bounced Cosme



BOUND FOR PALOMAS.

up and down, but he held on bravely, his arms broadly akimbo, his linen blouse floating out in horizontal lines, his sombrero dancing up and down, as if to keep pace with himself. He swayed backward and forward, jolted and jostled as he kept up his wild career! Now and again he ventured to turn and look back, as if to implore us not to go so fast; but our horses' spirits could not be checked; there was no help for Cosme!

Once, when hedged in by an impassable barrier of stone on one side, and a line of determined *burros* on the other, we were near enough to call aloud: "Cosme, go more slowly! ride in the rear!" The temptation and pressure of circumstances were too great, and once again, after an interval of rest, my ears were greeted by the

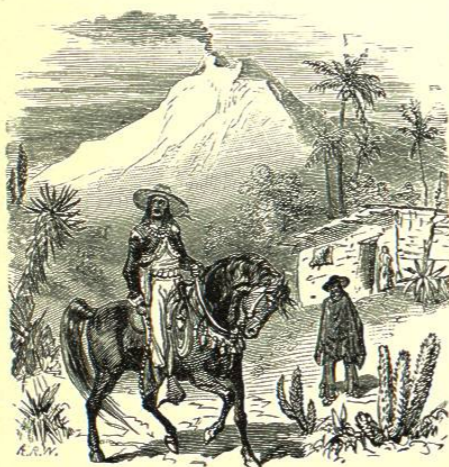
feeble, halting voice of Cosme, uttering in hollow accents: "*Pos no es costumbre!*"

That grim specter of departed *mozos* was again thrust at me. But what recourse had I?—what vengeance dared I seek upon this poor untutored boy, for his deep devotion to what he considered the duty of his office? If Cosme had died on the road, or a hundred robbers had surrounded and threatened his life and property, except he rode in the rear of the carriage, he would have forfeited his all, and his body would have been found, where all good *mozos* like to be—in front.

When Palomas was reached, and our horses were reined in preparatory to halting in front of the house where we were to spend the day, an amusing spectacle greeted us. Faithful Cosme was lying on the ground. The whites of his eyes only were visible; he quaked and shook, as if in convulsion; his tongue lolled from his mouth, and his whole attitude bespoke utter prostration. On stepping from the carriage, I ventured to go near him, and inquire as to the nature and extent of his injuries. Between chattering teeth and spasmodic jerks he raised himself on his elbow, saying: "*El caballo anda muy duro*" ("The horse goes very hard")—" *y tengo mucho dolor de cabeza*" ("and I have a bad headache").

Shortly afterwards when he appeared before me again, he had a green leaf pasted on either temple—the sovereign remedy of the common people for headache.

Palomas is a small village, with little to recommend it save that it is picturesquely situated in a pass—Cañon de las Palomas (Pass of the Doves)—in the Sierra Madre Mountains, which here separate the valley of Saltillo from the table-lands leading to San Luis Potosi. It has a thousand inhabitants, consisting for the most



A PICTURESQUE TRAVELER.

part of persons employed in the cotton factory, the leading industry, shepherds and laborers on the adjacent farms.

Rising somewhere amid the heights which frown down upon the inoffensive village a stream of pure, sparkling water resolves itself into quite an imposing cascade, making, at one jump, a fall of perhaps fifty feet, thence flowing, broken and frothing, along its tortuous way through the pass. Here the stream is deflected from its natural bed into a ditch to furnish water-power for a cotton factory of one hundred looms, and having served this purpose, it is taken through irrigating ditches, and spread over the corn and wheat fields of the Saltillo valley. The falling stream is hemmed in on one side by the jagged gray rocks, which rise up, naked and solemn, to grand heights—speaking, in their stern silence, unutterable things.

On the other side, we beheld the verdure of the native grasses, which lent beauty and color to the landscape after the destitution of the bare scenery of our monotonous sixteen-mile ride, and a touch of gentleness to this otherwise rugged and awe-inspiring scene. My imagination readily saw in the crags and serried peaks the likeness to some towering cathedral, and I almost heard the chimes from its turret. In fancy the silent multitude passed in and out at the doors of this imaginary temple, to whisper their petitions, and then disappear in the deep recesses of the rocks.

It was through the Cañon de Palomas that General Minon, who commanded a wing of Santa Anna's cavalry during the American war, was sent to flank General Taylor, from the Agua Nueva, on the day of the battle of Buena Vista. Had General Taylor met with defeat, this cavalry force would have been in Saltillo almost as soon as Taylor's army.

The neighboring mountains are covered with extensive pineries, yielding large quantities of lumber, tar, pitch, and turpentine, which find a market near home.

The house of the *hacendado*, where we spent the day, was typical of all houses in the towns and villages—a plain adobe structure, low, flat, and with simple pounded, earthen floors. We had scarcely

entered the best room of the house, when one of my favorite Mexican processions approached the big door. A string of fifteen meek-looking donkeys laden with wood marched solemnly through the main hall just as they did in my own house, followed closely by the driver, uttering his characteristic "tschew! tschew!— and punching them at every step.

The parlor had its line of plain home-manufactured chairs, arranged methodically around the sides of the room, as close together as they could possibly be placed. At the extreme end, farthest from the door, was a home-contrived sofa, or divan, which extended almost the entire length of the room. It was built into the wall, having only the front legs visible. Its height was nearly two feet from the floor. At either end were seven hard stiff cotton pillows elaborated with Mexican lace, the product of a universal feminine instinct. The covering was a gay chintz, which was fastened to the framework as a cushion, and the upholstery was completed below by a valance of the same fabric.



AS I LOOKED WHEN MOUNTED UPON THE SOFACITA.

The rocking-chairs,—home-manufactured also—occupied their normal attitudes as vis-à-vis, at either end of the sofa. I was tired from the long drive, and the rocking-chairs had an inviting look, so without ceremony I ventured to take one. Instantly three women came to me, all laying their hands tenderly about me, and with one voice insisted that I must occupy the sofa. To ascend this wonderful structure—"la sofacita," as it was called—I found it necessary to give a spring and a leap, almost as if vaulting into a saddle.

An unusual bustle and commotion about the house, and the continual passing back and forth of so many people, made it evident that some exciting event was about to take place. Two doctors were to perform some surgical operations. About half a dozen girls were

suffering from enlarged tonsils, which it had become necessary to remove. The girls belonged to different families, and this fact set me to speculating as to whether enlarged tonsils were contagious, customary, or due to the climate. Having already received so many proofs of their martyr-like devotion to their customs, I was prepared to adopt the second hypothesis upon the slightest evidence. When the surgeons were ready, the father of the eldest girl, with great tenderness, placed her in a chair. The mother fled to the corral to avoid the sight of her child's distress and pain. As soon as the girl was in a position ready for the instrument, she would jump, and wring her hands, crying and solemnly declaring, she could not, and would not, submit to the operation. All the neighbors came in to look on, and with difficulty she was finally held down by the strong arms of her father and one of the surgeons,—and the work was done. The father with deep concern, murmured something, to my ear almost inaudible, but he kissed the girl again and again; and at last the words came: "My poor child! my baby! my sweet, good girl!"

The other girls were soon induced, by the gay spirits and complacency of the first, to be seated and have a similar operation performed. I thought of the well-known fable of the fox, when the tree had fallen on his tail, depriving him of that useful appendage, when with characteristic cunning, he told the other foxes that to wear no tail was the mode, and thereupon no-tailed foxes at once became the prevailing style. An old woman, who looked like a servant, came in and performed various, and, to me, amusing incantations with the forefinger of her right hand; keeping up at the same time a continuous mumbling of some incoherences peculiar to her class.

The curiosity that was manifested by the crowd, and the earnest inspections that took place after the operations were made, and the vigilance with which the girls watched the disposition of their bereft members provoked a smile. It reminded me of childhood days, when we jealously guarded a tooth when it fell out, for fear that a pig might get it, and the dire consequence follow of a pig's tooth taking the place of the lost one.

If one thing more than another surprised me, it was the fact that almost without exception, all the family and the people gathered at the house of our host were afflicted with a distressing form of catarrh.

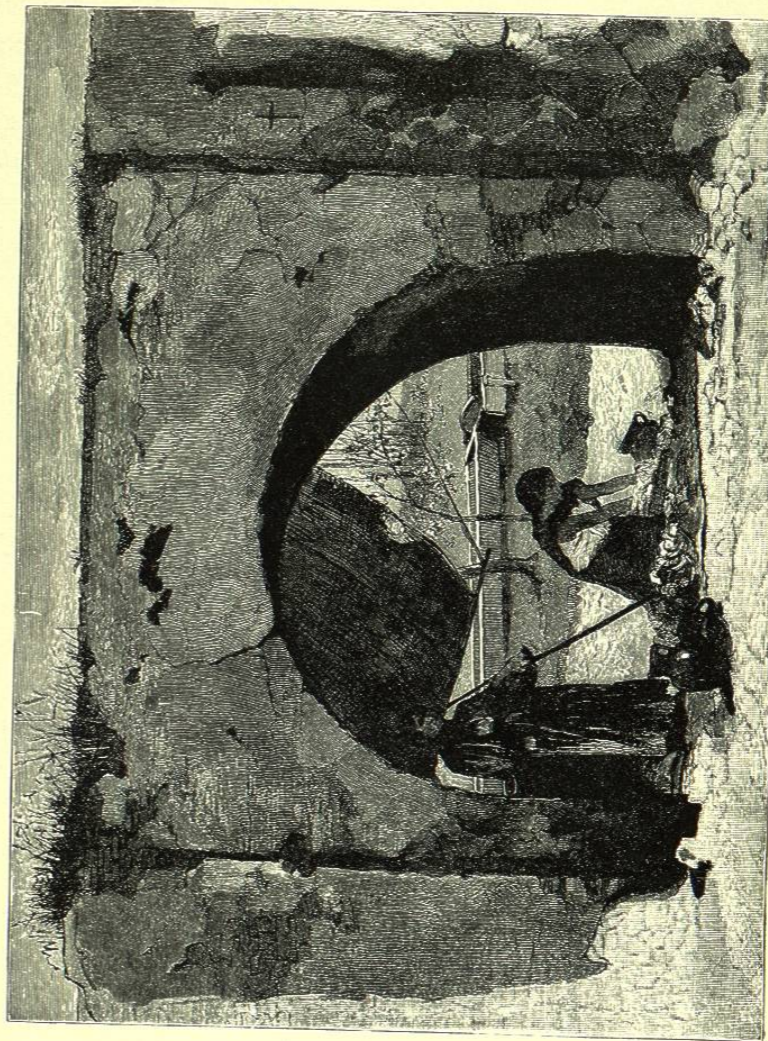
At such an altitude and in a clime so salubrious and bracing, high up in the mountains, with an atmosphere dry and pure, that either lung, nasal, or throat troubles should exist, afforded food for reflection.

Cosme, although sadly battered and bruised, managed to creep to the window, and look on at the result of the operations. On seeing what was going on, he muttered indistinctly: "*Caramba!*" (Good gracious!)—" *Por Dios santo!*" The painful experiences of his ride established a community of suffering between himself and the damsels, which gave intense pathos to his words.

About fifty persons had assembled in the house, or hung about the windows. I was so intensely absorbed in studying the strange dark faces and party-colored costumes that it was some time before it dawned upon me that I was, if possible, an object of still greater interest to them than they to me. I spoke to one or two of the women, and reassured by my friendly tones, they approached me. Soon others followed, when I became the center of an extended group—every one regarding me with almost unappeasable curiosity.

Everything about me, to the most trifling detail, filled them with childish astonishment. As their shyness vanished, they became as familiar as children. They toyed with the banded hair on my forehead, saying in amused tones: "*Que bonitas estan!*" "*Que chulas!*" ("How pretty they are!")

They took off my hat gently, and tried it on, one after another. They felt the texture of my dress—a very simple, navy blue nun's veiling—evidently regarding it as something unapproachably splendid. Then my fan caught their attention. It was the color of the dress, and strewn with red roses. They held it close to the dress, then to the hat, comparing them, and the fact that all three corresponded in color, struck them immediately as decidedly the proper thing. "She has good taste!" they said approvingly to one another,— "Yes, very good taste!—very good manners!—a very fine lady!"



AT HOME UNDER THE ACQUEDUCT.