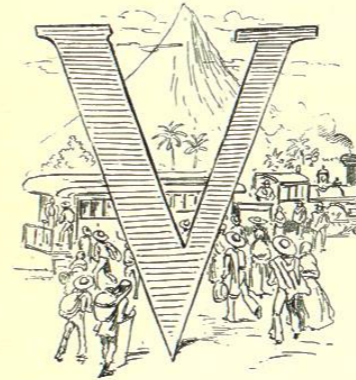


CHAPTER V.

FROM BORDER TO CAPITAL ALONG THE MEXICAN CENTRAL.



AMONOS!" shouts the smartly uniformed American conductor in the *estacion* on the further bank of the Rio Grande. This rhythmical Spanish word affords a pleasing contrast to its sharp prosaic equivalent known to us as "*All aboard!*" The bell rings, the engine shrieks and hisses, then smoothly we glide along in that crowning luxury of civilization—a Pullman car—into the "land of the cactus and sweet cacao."

The open plain stretched afar on this glorious, full-moon night, and seemed, like the ocean, to blend its horizon with the heavens. No sound broke the stillness save the rumble of the train or the occasional shriek of the locomotive with its warning to the loitering cattle on the road-bed, all unconscious of their danger.

The location of El Paso, whose lights were fast fading in the distance behind us, is in every way desirable, being the connecting point of the Mexican Central with the railways of the United States. Five connecting lines of railway enter the city: the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio; the Southern Pacific; the Texan Pacific; the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé, with good prospects for another. There can be no doubt but that it will be a great railroad center and distributing point for the Southwest.

The town hugs the river closely and nestles snugly in a fertile valley, perhaps fifty miles long, in which, where irrigating facilities are obtained, wheat and corn are produced in great abundance. Its alti-

tude is about three thousand five hundred feet above sea level, and the climate bears a strong resemblance to that of the table-lands of Mexico. The same irrigating ditches, lined on either side by stately cotton-wood trees, are serving the same purpose as when first constructed by the Jesuit missionaries, more than three hundred years ago. A circle of mountains to the north and east affords protection to the city from the sharp, penetrating winds that sweep over Texas from the plains of Kansas.

El Paso can boast of excellent hotels, the best being the Grand Central, and the possession of the only international street railway bridge in the world; also an interesting old church about three hundred years old. The greatest drawbacks, as a place of residence, are the clouds and columns of dust that for a great part of the year drive through the streets, entering the houses, and penetrating every nook and cranny.

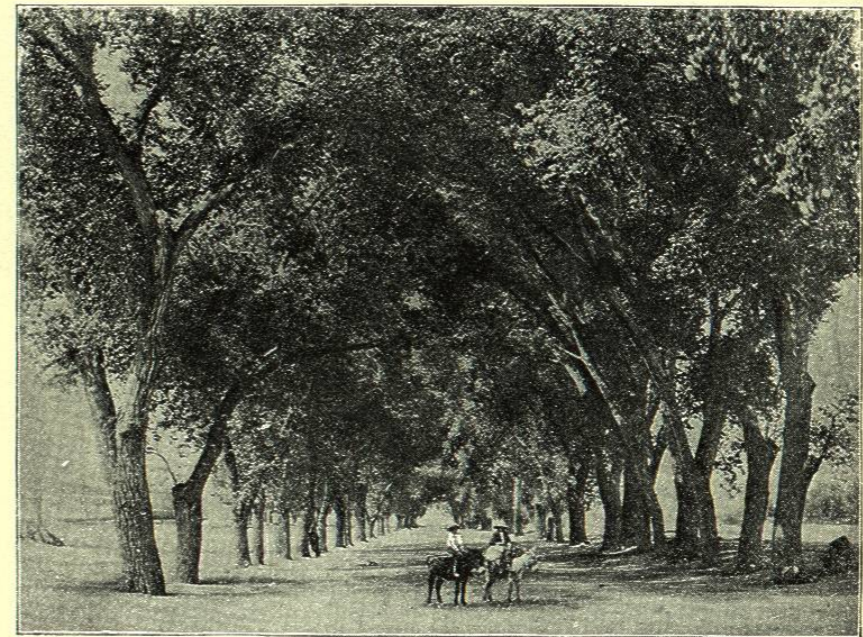
The old town of Paso del Norte is the Mexican El Paso, as Nuevo Laredo is the Mexican Laredo. Each one is a necessary complement to the other. Paso del Norte has, however, great advantage in point of age, having been founded about the year 1680. The town to-day bears the imprint of all Mexican architecture. The cathedral, once a stately and imposing structure, even now, when bereft of the greater part of its interior adornments, speaks volumes of the lapse and the inroads of time. The nave, chancel, altar, and ceilings bear traces of exquisite and masterly workmanship, but tell a mournful tale of decay and faded grandeur.

The famous grapes that are grown at Paso del Norte are perhaps the most prolific and delicious known to us, and in that genial soil, where irrigation is so skillfully employed, they are produced in quantities, and shipped to all parts of the country.

Curious fences inclose the farms and gardens—a boxing of cotton-wood poles filled in with mud or an earthen cement, making not only a secure, but a durable fence.

The country for perhaps two hundred miles on the west side of the Rio Bravo is but a counterpart of its neighbor, on the east or Texas side, for the same distance. Chihuahua, the first city on the Mexican

Central, has become a prominent point for mining operations, and probably a larger number of Americans are congregated there than at any place outside the capital. It has a fine climate, is situated in a beautiful and fertile valley, with all the accessories of a healthful and thrifty population. One hundred years ago, however, Chihuahua was larger than New York; to-day the population does not exceed thirty



THE STREET OF GUADALUPE, CHIHUAHUA.

thousand. But it still has the beautiful cathedral and ancient aqueduct, and must always be important as a mining center. A branch of the Mexican mint is also established there.

The sleepy old town of Santa Rosalia, with a population of about seven thousand, is the next. It has known no change for nearly a half-century, though situated in the midst of a fine agricultural region, and having an industrious, orderly population.

Dr. Charles E. Tarver, with his wife and five children, has resided

here for a number of years on account of the extreme healthfulness of the climate and the benefits the doctor has received for his protracted lung troubles. As their guest during my stay in Santa Rosalia nothing was more interesting than to watch these genuine American children transformed into veritable Mexicans. So thoroughly identified were these little people with the land of their adoption that in their daily play not one word of English was spoken; every movement, tone, gesture, and expression was entirely Mexican, even to their games and plays and *reboso*-wrapped dolls. The baby, christened Charles, repudiated his baptismal name and clung with infantile pertinacity to its Mexican synonym of Carlos, refusing to answer to any other. The next in age, Marianita, a little tot of three and a half years, interested me greatly with her wealth of golden curls and roguish face. She would sit on my lap by the hour entertaining me with the most amusing translations of Spanish into English and *vice versa*.

One day her father returned from the barber's with head so closely shaven as to attract the attention of Marianita. Climbing upon his chair the closer to observe the result of this tonsorial manipulation, she exclaimed, to the amusement of us all: "*Mi cabeza peloncita*" ("My bald-headed squash")!

Within a few years, warm springs have been discovered, that are said to possess wonderful healing properties.

My desire was intense to visit these springs, which must eventually prove a great health resort, but the difficulties attending such an undertaking were inconceivable.

The Rio Concha, which it was necessary to cross in order to reach the springs, was, at that time, out of its banks, and the only substitute for a boat, excepting the railway bridge, was an ordinary dry goods box manned by a brawny Indian. If we embarked at Santa Rosalia the prospects were fair of our disembarking ten or twenty miles below that point, so swift was the current; or, worse still, our primitive bark might be upset in mid-stream and ourselves and poor "Lo" left struggling in the muddy water. As the chances of so disastrous a termination to the voyage were very great, we concluded to forego the trip.

The remains of an old *adobe* fort that was captured by Donaphan when he was *en route* to join General Taylor are still standing.

Santa Rosalia is a fair representative of a country town. But though its resources are limited, the inhabitants are not without their national recreations, having a pretty little plaza, in which twice a week the band plays. Especially do they celebrate the 5th of May and the 16th of September.

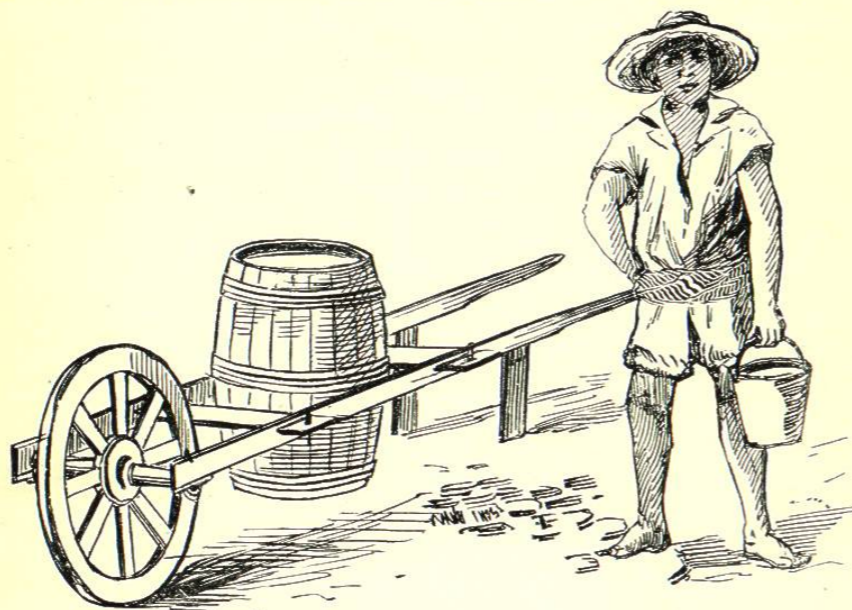
I enjoyed the latter occasion with them, and attended the grand *baile* (ball) in the evening, for which extensive preparations were made. The lack of ball-room or public hall formed no impediment, merely permitting the exercise of their ingenuity.

The open *patio* of the city hall was utilized for this purpose, first excavating about four feet of uneven earth, and refilling with good soil, adding, when leveled, great square stone slabs—placing straw thickly on these, with *manta* (brown domestic) stretched tightly over. And the floor of no salon could have been smoother for dancing. Lace curtains hung at each opening, mirrors and paintings alternating around the room, and garlands of the rich dark leaves of the cottonwood, tied with the national colors, filled the spaces between. A cover of *manta*, held firmly in place by maguey ropes, formed the ceiling of this unique ball-room, and numerous chandeliers illuminated the scene. When the *baile* opened and the gayly dressed *señoritas* and *caballeros* began the intoxicating movements of the *danza*, exhilarated by the excellent music, it was an enchanted bower.

The Santa Rosalians are a kind and hospitable people, but very fastidious in the observance of their social laws and obligations. On the night of the ball we went at half past eleven, but still the citizens had not arrived. The cotton-clad *mozos*, however, were going back and forth from the ball-room to the houses. I ascertained that the object of their stepping so cautiously to the front door, and peeping in, was to find out if any of the aristocracy had yet made their appearance. At twelve o'clock the labors of the *mozo* ceased, and with the rustle of silk and lace beauty and fashion entered. On the

faces of all satisfaction was evident that one belle had not arrived before the others.

The Rio Concho and the Rio Florida flank Santa Rosalia on either side, and from them open ditches run through the town, supplying water for domestic purposes. Policemen are stationed at intervals to prevent children from playing in the water, the water-carrier here as elsewhere being an important factor of domestic happiness and comfort. The Rio Concho is so well utilized for irrigating purposes



WATER-CARRIER OF SANTA ROSALIA.

that the haciendas for thirty miles on either side are amply supplied with water. The absence of timber along the streams is noteworthy, the only forest tree in this section being the cotton-wood. This fortunately occurs in abundance, and furnishes fuel.

In towns the size of Santa Rosalia, hotels are not yet considered necessary to the well-being of the inhabitants, the *mésón* supplying their place. Below will be found the "Notice to Travelers," as I saw it in that old *adobe* town. This and the water-spouts jutting out like giant arms across the street, afforded equal diversion.

"NOTICE TO TRAVELERS.

"Persons who wish to lodge in this *mésón* will subject themselves to the following rules :

"1st. The house is opened at 5 o'clock A. M., and closed at 10 P. M. Only in urgent cases will these hours be altered.

"2d. Feed for animals will be supplied at reasonable prices, but outside animals will not be received.

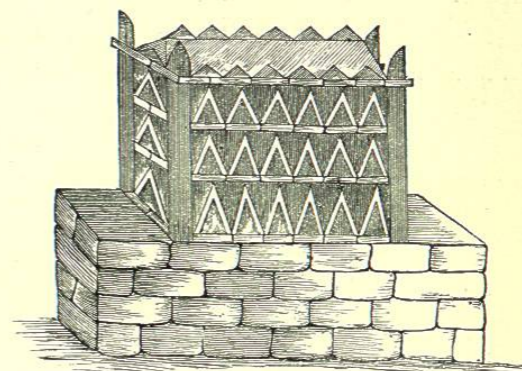
"3d. The prices for rooms are—for single rooms three reals per day, for double rooms four reals (fifty cents) per day. For each room, guests are entitled to two animals; all in excess of two will be charged three and a quarter cents per head per day for each animal. This charge is for standing room only, feed being extra.

"Carriages, wagons, and other vehicles will be charged one real per day, each.

"4th. The owner of this establishment is not responsible for objects lost from the rooms of travelers, or animals, or anything else, unless directly delivered to the care of the manager or left in the house."

The rooms at three reals per day were in front, and those for four, in the rear, near the horses.

The *patio* of this *mésón* had numerous posts in the ground, which I was assured were placed there for theatrical purposes. In the center of the open square was the only public hall of the town, and at the end, quite near the horses, a stage had been constructed with movable scenery, having its sills lashed to the floor by maguey ropes. On gala nights a canvas is stretched over the poles, as a cover; and with numerous lights, and the customary decorations, a brilliant effect is produced.



TOP OF KITCHEN CHIMNEY IN SANTA ROSALIA.

With many regrets my two weeks' delightful sojourn at the hospi-