

CHAPTER VI.

Resume my Journey.—Sorrow on bidding Adieu to my Host.—His Kindness at parting.—Road begins to Descend.—Changed Appearance of the Country.—Crops.—Salamanca.—Universal Custom.—Meet a Countryman, who renders me important Services.—Useless Bloodshed.—Advantages of a Passport.—Stage Lines.—Go Astray.—Strange Bed.—Recover the right Way.—Danger of Discovery.—Mode of raising Funds.—Guanahuato.—Poorer Classes of People.—Silver Mines.—Gambling and Drinking habits.—A Fellow-traveler.—Kindness of the People.—Appearance of the Country.—Scarcity of Water.—Robbed.—My fellow-traveler's Imprudence brings us into Danger.—Means of Living, Dwellings, and appearance of the People.—Parting Advice and Salutations.—Rich and Poor.—Peons.—Religious Exercises.—Barrens.—Fertile Spots.—Murders.—Sudden Thunder-storm.—Troubles at a Village.—The Alcalde.—Good Offices of our Host.—Green Lizards.—Wild Horses.—Mode of catching and breaking them.—Mexican Horse-gear.

HAVING now sufficiently recovered my health and strength, I resolved to prosecute my journey. To my kind friend I felt under many and weighty obligations. I felt that to his hospitality I owed my life; but I was so poor that I had nothing to pay. How I then wished that I had a fortune at my command, that I could pay him as he deserved. As it was, I must leave him poor as I found him. It was painful to leave this good old man. I had in a measure become attached to him, and he appeared to be so to me. When I told him of the necessity there was for my going, he urged me to stay with him. His generous heart would consider it as a favor done

to him, rather than an encumbrance, could I have accepted his kind offer.

I determined to start the next morning. He told one of his sons to get a horse and carry me some little distance. He did so, and on we started. We that day crossed the Laxa, a tributary of the St. Jago, which empties its waters into the Pacific Ocean. This sight greatly encouraged me, for I was now on the descending side, having passed the highest point of the table-land. My comrade went ten miles with me, then took his leave and returned home, bearing with him my deepest gratitude and heartfelt thanks.

The way now was mostly level; the valley was perfectly so, fertile, and highly cultivated. Corn, tobacco, and large fields of sugar-cane were growing on both sides of the road. Two crops a year is a common yield where they have industry to put them into the ground. Cotton is raised on some of the low lands to a considerable extent, though it will probably never be a staple production, owing to their ignorance in not knowing how to cultivate it properly, and their indolence in not attending to it at the proper time.

I traveled this day about thirty miles, and stopped at night at a rancho, where I was hospitably received and provided for; and the next morning I started early, being determined to reach Salamanca, distant forty miles. I now managed to live tolerably well, the inhabitants taking me for one of the San Patrio company, who had fought in defense of their country and religion. After I had got out of hearing of Queretaro, I told this story, and they believed it,

without asking me for a passport, a thing which I could not show them. Most of this day's journey was along the river which I had crossed the day before. For a few miles, the road was built up about two feet, on account of a large marsh; and on each side was a wall, plastered over with cement. About midway in this marsh were two high pillars by the road side. For what object these were built I know not.

I arrived at Salamanca after dark, and sought lodgings in the suburbs of the town, at the house of a priest. He was a fat, portly-looking person, kindness and good nature being stamped on his face. He received me with cordiality, gave me a supper, and then conversed about my country. He was quite intelligent and interesting in conversation. At eleven o'clock he permitted me to go to the bed I so much needed, for I was very tired. The next morning, after breakfast, I walked round the town in company with this priest. I found it to be a large and well-built town. Round its public square, the buildings were splendid for a Mexican town. The churches were large and spacious, and by the side of one stood a large convent. While in the square, the priest pointed to a man who was coming toward us, and said he was an American. This, to me, was news of the most gratifying kind. When we met, I spoke to him in Spanish. He looked at me a moment, and then answered in English; I excused myself to the priest, and went with my countryman. He went to his factory, which was half a mile from the town. When there, I asked him if he was an American. He said he

was. I asked what state he was from. He answered, Connecticut. "Then, sir," I replied, "as you are an American, I feel that I can ask your assistance in a matter of the utmost importance to me, and one that requires great discretion on your part." I then related enough of my history to show him the necessity of my having a passport, and asked if he could aid me in getting one. He replied that he could; that he was well acquainted with the commandante, and on terms of intimacy with him; and he readily offered to go and get me one. At his request I stayed there all day, as he could not go before the afternoon. I passed the intervening time as I best could, going round the factory, and then the town.

I will here mention a universal custom, which I forgot to notice before. Wherever a dead body has been found, there they bury it, and over it place a cross. If it is near a tree, the cross is nailed to the tree. Along the road that I came I passed numerous crosses almost daily. This gives a very correct idea of the safety, or, rather, danger of the road; for if a person is supposed to have money, he is seldom suffered to pass unmolested. But what brought this circumstance to my mind more particularly was this fact: Just below the factory, in the open field, there was a large number of these crosses, some three or four hundred. I was informed that during the war with Spain a battle had been fought at this place, in which the Mexicans were victorious, and these crosses were erected over the graves of those who were killed.

At the time appointed I went, in company with the

director of the factory, to the office of the commandante. It was represented that I that morning had lost my passport; that I was one of the San Patricio company, and had fought with honor and fidelity in favor of this country, &c., and he concluded by humbly asking for another from him to enable me to prosecute my journey. The commandante was a fat, good old soul, and looked as though he was too lazy to inquire very strictly into the truth of the matter. He inquired my name, and who gave me the passport I had lost, &c., which I readily answered. He then gave me another. With this I felt as rich as though I could command the whole of the Indies. Now I was safe; and if life and health were spared me, I knew I should again see home and friends. To my kind friend, who had rendered me this important service, I returned my warmest thanks. He said that he had been compelled to be very circumspect in his language since the war; and, even as it was, he said they had talked of arresting him on suspicion that he would convey information to the Americans. Had they reflected one moment, they must have seen that, situated as far as he was from the army, he could not have acted as a spy. But they did not arrest him; his friend the commandante saved him. Still, he said that he would do all he could to an American soldier in attempting to escape from captivity. He took me to his house, entertained me, and clothed me.

Next morning, with many hearty wishes for my safety, he bade me farewell. In addition to a suit of clothes, a pair of shoes, and a hat, he gave me

three dollars in money. In value, the whole would amount to near fifteen dollars. If I had been so fortunate as to get this passport at Queretaro, I should now have been at Guadalajara. But those men to whom I there applied were as destitute of sympathy for me as a common brute, and I verily believe would as soon have put forth a hand to the assistance of a dog. I am only sorry that I have not their names, for it would afford me as much pleasure to hold them up to deserved execration as to mention the many instances of kindness that I received, not only from my countrymen, but also at the hands of those against whom we were waging a bloody war. I say bloody, because it is an undeniable fact that the marches of our army and the occupation of many of their towns were attended with unnecessary bloodshed. In proof of this, we have only to refer to the fields of Monterey, where scores of Mexicans were slaughtered from pure revenge. At the camp near Saltillo scores were found dead, having been immolated on the altar of vengeance. That the Mexicans were the first aggressors in murdering some of our soldiers can not be denied; but it was not right to sacrifice the innocent for the crimes of the guilty. These things were published through the republic, and generated a feeling of hostility and vengeance that was hard to allay. Hence any who would desert and join the Mexican standard would be received with open arms; and the reputation of the San Patricio battalion was spread from ocean to ocean, and to that, more than any thing else, do I owe my present safety.

But to resume my narrative. I that day kept in

the road, and with a feeling of safety that I had not experienced since the time I first started. I now had my passport, and in every town I came to I could walk boldly and in open daylight to any part of it. I now could go to every alcalde, where I wished to stop, and demand of him quarters to sleep.

Here I may state that, by a recent order of government, every alcalde or commandante was required, by all means in their power, to aid and assist any of those belonging to the San Patricio company who wished to go to the Pacific—to give them quarters at night, and, if necessary, to furnish them with money, &c. This order I now took advantage of, as a matter of course; for, whenever I came to a town, I would present myself to the superior officer and show him my passport; sometimes he would countersign it, sometimes not; but he would always give me some money and an order to go to a meson (or tavern), where a room was given me. This room I could occupy so long as I stayed there, and free of charge.

After leaving Salamanca, the road was bad—down deep gulleys, and ascending others on the opposite bank. Although the stages between Mexico, Zacatecas, and Guanahuato travel this road, they never repair it; yet it might, with very little labor, be made an excellent road. These stages were built at Troy, New York, and when I saw one it strongly reminded me of home. They were projected by a Spaniard, who brought the vehicles into the country. He is now running them between Mexico and all the principal cities, and is very rapidly accumulating a handsome fortune as the fruits of his enterprise. This is

the first instance in which I have seen any thing that resembles Yankee enterprise in Mexico projected and carried into execution by a Mexican, or even a Spaniard.

That night I stopped at a small hacienda, and went to the house of the dueño, who, after examining my passport, gave me permission to remain in his house till morning. He gave me supper and breakfast, and in the morning I resumed my journey. The country was now almost entirely uninhabited and uncultivated. During that day I suffered considerably from want of water, and I passed but two houses the entire day. The next day I again lost my way, and before I found out my mistake I had traveled three days.

One night, during this period, as I could not find a house, I slept out in the open field. As I had been long accustomed to this, it made but little difference; but, having nothing for supper, the situation was far from pleasant; no corn or potatoes could be seen, nor could I perceive any birds or squirrels, as it was now near dark. As the rainy season had not yet passed, I expected to get a wetting before morning. This proved to be the case, for in the night I was awakened by some rain falling on my face. I just turned over a little, put my arm over my face to shelter it, and went to sleep again. It rained hard all night, and next morning I found that I was nearly submerged in water, as it reached half way over me. The reason of this was, that the night before I had selected a sort of hollow place to lie in because of the protection it would afford me against the wind, and

this hollow was filled with water. In the morning the sun came out clear. I got up, shook myself, and pressed on, determined, if possible, to find a house.

Toward nightfall I found one. I walked in, got something to eat, and asked leave to stay all night. They granted me my request. I told them of the mishap of the preceding night, when they said that up near the mountains, about three miles from where I was, there was a small town, but it could not be seen from the road. I inquired of them about the road that I was to take, and to my sorrow I was again informed that I must take the back track. I thanked them for their information, and went to sleep, but my slumbers were disturbed by the attacks of swarms of nameless little animals. Next morning I prepared for an early start. Before leaving, they gave me directions where to stay that night, to avoid sleeping in the open air.

At the end of three days I again came into the right road without meeting with any adventure worth relating. I then traveled on as fast as possible, as the distance to a stopping-place was twenty miles, and the day was more than half gone. Common report says that this road is infested with bands of robbers without number, and that hardly a day passes but some one is robbed, or perhaps killed. I myself saw several crosses that had evidently been put up quite lately, but I do not know that I ever saw any robbers, not having been molested by them yet. I have, however, been very much troubled at times by the sight of large bodies of cavalry, some of whom were going in the same direction that I was. My

only and greatest fear was that some officer might be with them who knew me; and in one or two instances I saw three with whom I was quite well acquainted, and who knew me as a prisoner of war; but, owing to my being in another place, a change of clothes, and their not expecting to see me, I was fortunately not recognized. This was a danger that I encountered every time I came into a town of any size; but an overruling Providence protected me.

The names of all the towns that I passed through I do not recollect, for I did not note them down, as they were small, and nothing of importance occurred; but of the larger sized I generally took down a memorandum. It was my usual practice, when I came to any town, to go to the priests, and all the merchants and wealthy men, present them my passport, and ask them to assist me on my journey; this they did cheerfully, and sometimes abundantly. In some towns I got even four or five dollars. This is the way that I supported myself since leaving Salamanca, and it was a resource that never failed me. I do not approve of the practice of begging, nor would I feel willing to acknowledge myself a beggar; but I do not now feel that I have been much disgraced by having practiced it under those circumstances; it certainly was considered as an honor by them, as they were under the impression that I was reduced to this extremity by fighting against my countrymen.

I now drew near Guanahuato or Guanaxuato. The road was rough, and in some places mountainous. About five days before reaching that city I forded a river which was wide, but so shallow that none of

my clothes were wet in fording it. The country was more mountainous than the part that I had passed through. It seemed to be a continuous chain of mountains, one piled up on another, and only here and there a patch could be found that was cultivated. I was now in the midst of the best mining region of Mexico, both of gold and of silver. Quicksilver, also, is found here, but not in sufficient quantities to pay the working of the mine.

After a few days of rough traveling I arrived at Guanahuato, and presented myself to the authorities. Good quarters were assigned me at the quarter, and the next morning I took a stroll to examine one of those opulent cities of which I had read so much. I could scarcely realize that I was in one of those places where wealth is acquired as though by magic—where fortunes are sometimes made in an hour. The entrance to the city, on the side that I came, is through a narrow pass, guarded by high mountains on one side, and a dark, impassable gulf on the other. In this pass are gates, which at night, I believe, are closed. The city itself is built on the side of a mountain; the streets which run along its length lie one above the other, each being on a level with the roofs of those houses that are built on the street below. The walls on the tops of the houses are covered with grass; and when a person is at the top, and looks below, he is astonished in not being able to see more houses. A field of grass appears to be spread out before him, and all that presents a variety is the churches, whose numerous spires rear their towering tops on high.

The Capitol is a beautiful building, large and spacious; the Mint, and, in short, all the public buildings, are more grand and imposing in appearance than in any place I had yet seen. There were some Englishmen here, a company of whom owned and worked one of the best silver mines in Mexico. I did not see any of these, nor did I wish to do so, having seen enough of them in Queretaro.

The poorer classes, I observed, were better dressed, and appeared to be more above the condition of the same class than in any other part of Mexico, probably owing to the fact that more money was in circulation, and obtained with greater facility.

The mountains here afford an inexhaustible source of wealth. Some dig only just enough to supply their wants, and with this remain content; others work their mines day and night. One mine was shown me which was discovered in the following singular manner. A poor peasant was going over the mountain one day on foot. Night overtook him before he was half way down, and he built a fire, and collected some brush to keep it going all night. He then lay down, wrapped in his blanket, and went to sleep. In the morning, when he awoke, his fire was gone out; the wind had blown away the ashes, and the vegetable matter that had accumulated above the rocks had burned clean off. The heat of the fire had been so great that the rock had become calcined, and separated from the rich metal it contained. The poor peasant then discovered the source of his present wealth. He was not able to erect mills to grind the stone, but he commenced by digging and selling the

stone at so much the aroba, about twenty-five pounds. He continued this until he was able to build mills and work his mine to advantage. He is now one of the richest men of Guanahuato, and his property is counted by millions. This is not a solitary instance; others, equally striking, were related to me.

Where so much money is in circulation, gambling and drinking (those curses of Mexico) are practiced to great excess. The passion for gambling pervades all classes of society; men, women, and even children are victims to this ruinous vice. I have seen little children, who could barely talk plain, take their *claco* or *quartilla* (three cents), run to their mothers, hold it up to them, and lisp *monte!* The wealthier classes I have seen staking their thousands, and losing them with as much apparent indifference as though it was a hair from their head, or a button from their vest. I was told that one man in this city staked and lost one hundred thousand in one game; but I shall say more on this subject hereafter.

I had been here three days, when I made preparations for a start. On the following morning I found that, in coming to this place, I had gone out of my way about five days' journey. I had all the time supposed that it was in my route direct to Guadalajara, but here I found out that I was mistaken; I took the wrong road at the place where I forded the river. But I was well paid in coming here, both in money, clothes, &c., and also in the new and interesting objects that I saw.

While at Guanahuato I accidentally came across one of the San Patricio company, who had been here

some months. He determined to go to Guadalajara in my company, and thence to the Pacific. His name was James Mahon, an Irishman; and a more disagreeable person could hardly be found. He was eternally drinking and fighting, and would frequently quarrel with the Mexicans, a course which often endangered our lives. This I did not know until after we had traveled together several days. The chief reason why I consented to go with him was because of the loneliness I often experienced in traveling alone through a country for the most part thinly inhabited. I was further induced to this step by the representations of the dangers of the way. It was said that the inhabitants in some small villages were very hostile to foreigners, and in two instances had attacked and killed some few of this same San Patricio company. If this was so, two, I thought, were better than one, and both would stand a better chance of escape should an attack be made.

The morning we left Guanahuato we made an early start, and traversed the route which I had previously come. This we did with considerable comfort and ease, for the inhabitants showed us all the kindness in their power. Being acquainted with me, our food and lodging cost us nothing; and they seemed to vie with each other to see who should do the most for us. They would frequently put us on their horses and carry us a few miles, so that this part of the journey was the most pleasant of the whole route. This continued on their part as far as the river, which I must again cross to get into the road which I was to take. After this the people were all strangers, or,