

I have seen saddles and bridles that cost eight hundred dollars. A part of the seat, pommel, and stirrups was solid silver; but from ten to seventy-five dollars is a common price.

CHAPTER VII.

Patatlan. — Daring Scheme. — Career of Ciriacco Gomez. — Escape from his Proposal. — Departure from Patatlan at Midnight. — Arrive at Leon. — Incidents there. — Suspicions of the Commandante. — How removed. — Raising the Wind. — Rescued from Danger by a Priest. — Description of Leon. — Donkeys. — Mules. — Gloomy Prospects. — Nocturnal Alarm. — Road to Lagos. — The Mail. — Elysian Scene. — Arrive at Lagos. — A dangerous Acquaintance. — Unexpected Generosity. — Fruits. — Beating the Rounds.

WE pursued our way near the mountains until we were past the second ranch, when we took the main road. Being now beyond all danger from the alcalde of Calais, we jogged on until after dark, when we reached a place called Patatlan.

We here related the incidents of our journey of the two previous days, and showed our passports. On telling of our destitution, a private gentleman generously offered us a supper, lodging, and breakfast. On his hospitality, therefore, we trespassed for the night. Our new-found friend conversed with us until late at night; and we related to him the reception we had met with on the preceding night at Calais, as well as the dangers of the day before. In reply, he said that the road through which we had passed was indeed very dangerous, but not more so than a portion of the country through which we were yet to go. He said that the government was then so utterly destitute of the means to disperse these bandits, that

they had organized in large bands in every section of the country, and were daily committing their depredations on quiet and unoffending citizens with impunity. Even officers of the government were sometimes found to be in league with them. In proof of this, he related the following incident:

About two years before, a detachment of troops attacked and routed a band of these robbers, taking many of them prisoners. They marched them to the nearest village, to put them in the carcel or jail. On arriving there, the commanding officer inquired for the alcalde; he, however, was not to be found. After a while a man stepped up, and, pointing to one of the prisoners, said, there was the alcalde. Such proved to be the fact; and he was taken, together with his comrades, to the capital, tried, and executed. Our host further remarked that he had no doubt whatever but that the alcalde of Calais was also connected with robbers.

About ten o'clock at night, the usual hour for supper with the Mexicans, a hearty one was brought us; and a good bed was then furnished us, on which we passed a comfortable night.

The next morning our kind host urged us to stay and rest all that day, so as to travel on the following morning with renewed vigor. This we consented to do, the more readily as we were in hopes of finding some travelers who were going the same route. After breakfast he accompanied us round the town, asking his friends to assist us either with money, clothes, or provisions. He represented to them the ill luck that had befallen us on the road. We were consequently

well provided with money, and furnished with some clothes, and a blanket was given to each of us.

During the day I saw a man who formerly had been a soldier in the Mexican army, and was in the hospital at San Juan a part of the time that I was there, and who well knew me. His name was Ciriacco Gomez. I was struck dumb with alarm when first I saw him. He recognized me at the same time I did him; and my doom, I now thought, was sealed. He, however, came up to me, and cordially shook me by the hand. He then stated to the by-standers that he knew me well, that I was a good soldier, and deserved their greatest sympathy. This course was mysterious to me, the more so as I expected to have been betrayed by him. Some scheme most evidently was in his head, in which he wished me to join. This was the only way in which I could solve the problem.

After a while he asked me to go to his house with him; this I accordingly did. When there, he placed before me some brandy, and urged me to drink. In a few moments he inquired where I was going. I replied to Guadalajara. He asked if I had got a passport. I replied I had. He then asked how I had got away from San Juan del Rio, where he first became acquainted with me; also, what was my object in going away, &c., &c. To all these questions I gave such answers as I thought best. "Now," says he, "I well know that your object is to get to some sea-port, and go on board some American vessel." Thinking it was perfectly useless to deny what were my real intentions any longer, I candidly acknowledged that, as the Mexican government refused

to give me up when an exchange was made, I was therefore determined to liberate myself by going to the Pacific Ocean and taking refuge on board an American man-of-war. I then appealed to his honor as a man not to betray me. He asked me if I was willing to save myself, and make myself and comrade rich and independent for life. "Now," thought I, "the secret is oozing out." He then said that he had an enterprise on foot, which if I and my comrade would join, he would take a solemn oath not to betray me, but afford every possible facility in effecting my escape to the Pacific. It was, he said, a short enterprise, but attended with great danger; yet, with his plan of operations, he thought it must be attended with complete success.

From the character of the man, I knew he contemplated some desperate attempt. He had been long in the army, was all through the wars with Texas, was present at the massacres of Goliad and the Alamo, and had long sustained the character of a reckless dare-devil. He himself had related his adventures to me while we were together in the hospital. After a few moments' silence, he proceeded to detail the nature of the business in which he wished me to engage. It appears that it is usual to transport from Guadalajara to the city of Mexico all the specie that has been coined at the former place. This is done also from the other mining districts. It is sent generally at the end of every three months, and frequently amounts to a million of dollars, or even more. It is packed on mules, and sent in charge of a strong escort, amounting to a hundred or a hundred and

fifty men. Gomez had conceived the project of capturing one of these *conductas*, as they are called. He had spies employed in the capital, from whom he received notice that one was expected to start in about a week from that time, and in two weeks would be where we then were, in charge of a colonel and one hundred men. This he had resolved to take, and he wanted about one hundred and fifty men, nearly all of whom he had already engaged. He offered me and my comrade a command if we would join in the scheme.

The place of attack he fully described, so that I recognized it as I passed through it the next day. It was a narrow and deep ravine, thickly lined with chapparal bushes on each side, and some twenty rods in extent. His company was to be divided into three divisions. One was to lie in ambush at each end, and the third, commanded by himself, was to occupy the bushes in the ravine. When the *conducta* had fairly entered, a signal was to be given and a charge made. The divisions occupying the entrances were to advance and prevent any from making their escape. The escort being thus hemmed in on all sides, success must have been certain.

After he had detailed all his plans to me, I requested time to consider the matter, to consult my comrade, &c., and agreed to meet him the next night, when a full and explicit answer should be given. I also stipulated that we should better not meet or be seen together during the next day. To this he agreed, and we then separated, not, however, till he had forced me to take another drink of his brandy.

I went back to the house of my kind host, where I found my comrade already awaiting me with considerable anxiety, and, strange to say, perfectly sober. To him I related the nature of the conversation I had had with Ciriacco Gomez on his promise of secrecy. I then told him I was an escaped prisoner, and that I had been recognized as such by that man. We determined not to join him, at all events, but to escape out of town as speedily as possible. I looked out into the streets, and on the corner I saw the man I now most dreaded. He appeared to be on the watch, and I concluded it was of course for me. I did not appear to be confused nor any way disconcerted, although my situation was now a most trying one. Should he denounce me to the authorities, death, certain and inevitable, would be my doom. I, however, boldly walked up to him, made some commonplace remark, and passed on.

As I had till the next night to give an answer, I was in hopes of making my escape. As it was now near night, I resolved to discover, if possible, some mode of getting away unperceived, should I happen to be watched. I then returned to the house where we stayed, and went into the yard to see if it communicated with any other streets. Unfortunately, it did not. We then got on the top of the wall and saw another garden, and beyond a yard which led to one of the back streets. This was just what we wanted, and our plan was then quickly formed. This was to be our place of egress after dark. We then informed our host that it was necessary for us to leave that night. He urged for an explanation why we

must needs travel in the night. This we could not give; but, seeing that our anxiety was great, he no longer hesitated, and kindly gave his consent. We then told him the way that we should go, and asked him, as a great favor to us, to keep our departure entirely still, at least during the next day. This he readily promised. We also asked him to say, should he be questioned relative to our departure and route, that we had gone over the mountains, there being another road that led to Guadalajara. By this means I was in hopes of so completely deceiving the man that he would not obtain any clew as to where I was until I was entirely out of his reach.

Between eleven and twelve o'clock at night all became still, and our good and kind friend led us into the back yard. We then scaled the wall, and jumped down into the garden on the opposite side. From that we went into another yard, and thence into the highway. Our friend conducted us through the town, put us on the road that we were to travel, bade us good-by, and returned. I would here remark that the sword which I found in the meson at Calais I had succeeded in bringing with me without detection. This was my only hope should I be molested in my flight. As we had had a good rest, we traveled on as fast as possible. The cool weather, and being somewhat excited with fear, caused us to make good headway, and with but little fatigue. We determined, should we have it in our power, to give warning to the commanding officer of this *conducta* of the threatened danger.

I will now relate a part of the adventures of Ciri-

acco Gomez, as he himself told them to me when in the hospital of San Juan del Rio. He was born in the State of Durango. His parents, though not wealthy, were in comfortable circumstances. They gave him as good an education as that part of the country afforded; but he was of such a heedless and reckless disposition that he was always in some difficulty. When about the age of sixteen he killed one of his father's peons, in consequence of which act he was forced to fly from home. At that time the war between Mexico and Texas was raging with extreme ferocity and vindictiveness. "Here was a field," he remarked, his eyes shining like two balls of fire, "in which my love of daring adventure could be gratified to the full." He at once enlisted in the cavalry, and forthwith marched for Texas.

By his address, dexterity, and daring courage, he soon attracted the notice of his general, by whom he was frequently employed as a scout. His manner of proceeding on these expeditions is worth relating. He used, he said, to mount his horse after sunset, and ride very cautiously toward the Texan lines, but not near enough to be discovered. As soon as it was dark, he would gradually approach nearer, and then creep on the side of his horse, by putting his knee in the stirrup leather, and letting his horse feed round just as he chose. In this position he would remain until he had ascertained all that he wished in regard to the force, position, &c., of the enemy. He would then move to another point, and repeat the same process. Thus he always obtained exact information relative to the force and disposition of the Texan army.

On one of these occasions, however, he came very near losing his life. He had approached rather too near the enemy's lines; some motion was made by the horse which caused some of his accouterments to rattle. This excited the attention of the sentry, who was not more than thirty feet from him. It was a dark night, but yet the horse could be seen, although, as it was only a horse, it was not challenged by the sentry. When this noise was heard, however, his suspicions were aroused. The sergeant of the guard was called; he came, looked at the horse, and, suspecting that something was wrong, fired into him. The animal bounded, ran a short distance, and fell dead. Gomez then left him, and ran with all his speed; but he was pursued, and fired at several times. He finally escaped, however, and unhurt.

He was now promoted to a lieutenantancy, and permitted to take the separate and independent command of about fifty men, whose duty it was to hover around the lines of the enemy, and do them what damage they could, and also to give information relative to any of their movements. When acting in this capacity, he said that he never took any prisoners, but always killed every one who might chance to fall into his hands. "In short," said he, "it was a war of extermination."

At length he had a quarrel with his commander, and, in his anger, struck him. He was then tried by a court-martial, cashiered, and again put in the ranks. He was afterward at the battle of the Alamo, and took an active part in that horrible massacre; he also shared in that horrid affray where the noble Fan-

ning and his brave companions were brutally murdered after they had surrendered, and after the Mexican commander had passed his word of honor that they should not only be saved, but protected from any ill usage. He was also with Ampudia when he invested Mier, then held by the brave General Green. Having been so severely wounded that he was unable to continue any longer in the army, he was left at San Juan in the hospital. He was wounded between Vera Cruz and Mexico in a fight with the Americans.

While in the army, Gomez had traversed the entire length and breadth of Mexico. In proof of some of his remarks, he showed me one day numerous scars that he had received in the several engagements in which he had taken part. I frequently asked him if he thought it was honorable to conduct a war in the brutal and savage manner which his countrymen had pursued in Texas. He replied that all was fair in war; that any means by which a general could secure ultimate victory was the proper course for him to pursue; and if these bloody massacres would be productive of ultimate benefit, the commander was excusable to order them.

Our road was to-day most of the way level, and we traveled on without any interruption. We met occasionally a rancho, who would look quite cross at us, and then pass on. About ten in the morning we came to the ravine already spoken of as the place where the contemplated robbery was to take place. It was, indeed, an admirable location for such a deed. It was my intention, if we met this escort, to warn the officer of this place, and the intended attack; but,

unfortunately, I never met him, nor do I now know any thing further of this enterprise. With regard to this man's motives for trying to enlist me with him in this scheme, I can only say the probable reason was, that, knowing the character of the Americans to be bold and daring, he thought our example at the head of his band would be attended with the most happy consequences. He also most likely thought, as he well knew my situation, that, should he threaten to expose me, I would rather join him than be denounced, tied to a stake, and shot. He little understood the workings of my mind, however; for, at the very moment of his making this proposal, I was revolving in my mind the chances for escape; and after he had revealed to me his future intentions, I no longer stood in the same fear that I previously did, for I could as easily prove him a robber as he could prove me an escaped prisoner. I, however, did fear that he would discover I had gone before the time I had promised to meet him should arrive, and that he would send some of his men either to kill me and my companion, or to bring us safely back; but we arrived safe at Leon about three in the afternoon.

When we first entered the town a gentleman met us, of whom we inquired the way to the office of the commandante. He directed us to follow him. We did so, and he conversed with us on the way relative to our journey, &c. At length he stopped at a large and splendid house, and knocked for admittance. The door was soon opened by the porter. On entering, we were directed to take a seat in the corridor while he went to speak to the commandante. In a

few moments he returned, accompanied by that officer. We showed him our passports; he simply read them, and then, without countersigning, returned them. They then bid us follow them; for what purpose they did this I can not say. We went, however, and they took us down to the lower end of the city; they there entered a large and well-built house, and directed us to take seats just on the outside of the door leading to the main room. Within this room a large company of gentlemen had collected, and, from the noise that was made, they appeared to be enjoying themselves very freely. Now we would hear a Champagne bottle break; tumblers would be thrown about, and then all hands would join in singing songs. In the mean time a cup of good coffee had been served up to us, which, in our wearied state, was very acceptable.

From the time of our first sitting down there we saw a gentleman standing in the door, apparently listening to what we had to say. It occurred to me at once that this man understood English, and was taking this means to find out whether or not we were what we represented ourselves to be, and this evidently was the object in bringing us here. We at once regulated our conversation accordingly. It will be remembered that I always represented myself as an Irishman, for that people at that time stood higher in the estimation of the Mexicans than any other nation. The principal reason was that the Irish were known to be mostly Roman Catholics, and oppressed by a Protestant government; this excited all their sympathies in favor of the poor Irish. Another rea-

son was, a report that a large British force was coming to assist the Mexicans, and was then lying at Havana. This report had become almost universal in this section of the country; and they frequently told me, with great confidence and glee, how they would drive the Americans from their soil as soon as the British army should make a landing, which would be at no distant day. These reports I had little confidence in, yet policy induced me to acquiesce in all they said.

As soon as I discovered this man listening at the door, we commenced talking about "swate Ireland," our anxiety to get to Tepic, where was a British consul, &c.; then we turned the conversation on the expected invasion of the British army. We had conversed on this subject some time, when he for whose benefit we were rehearsing this story came out and began to talk with us. He asked us all manner of questions relative to the American forces, their movements, &c., and then asked if General Scott was aware of the British coming to the aid of the Mexicans. I told him that if it indeed was a fact, he could not be ignorant of it. He then asked what course Scott would pursue. I replied that he would hold all the places he then occupied until forced to leave them, and that, from the character of the man, I thought he would fight every inch of the ground before he would abandon it.

I do not now recollect all he said, but he had quite a long conversation with us. Soon after he went in, the two gentlemen who conducted us thither came out, and went with us to the commandante's house;