

treachery that brought them to their present condition.

It was now the 24th of February, and I had been a prisoner one year. During that time I had seen a large portion of this country, and traveled upward of two thousand miles on foot. I had experienced almost every vicissitude of fortune that a man could well experience within so short a period of time; I had been at times feasted, and at times almost starved.

As an apology for my narrative being irregular, and often disconnected, I may observe that the circumstances under which I took my notes compelled me to be very brief, and to omit many things necessary to a regular narrative, which are now so much out of my mind that, as I can not clearly recall them, I am obliged to overlook them altogether. With this apology, I will proceed to describe their manner of conducting a school.

At Amatlan I was invited by the teacher to visit his school, and at the time appointed I went. On entering, all the scholars rose and gave me a sort of military salute. It numbered some fifty-seven scholars. They were all reading aloud when I went in; some had newspapers, some little pamphlets, but not one had a regular school-book. I was conducted to a seat, which was elevated above the floor. A segar was given me to smoke, in which the master joined. He then showed me the writing of the scholars, and also his own; and, in truth, I must say that, were it to save my life, I could not read it. It was no better than a scrawl made by a new beginner. He then got his arithmetic, and urged me to teach him, remark-

ing, at the same time, that he had gone no further than simple addition. I declined teaching him, urging as my reason that I was not a good arithmetician. When it was time to close the school, each boy was ordered up to read. On coming to his presence, every urchin would kneel down as to his God, and on his bended knees read his lesson, and then return to his seat. This was repeated till all had read, when the school closed. This manner of conducting a school is universal in this country. Let it not be understood, however, that all teachers are so supremely ignorant; far from it. Some are well-educated and intelligent men; but in remote places like this, almost any ignoramus is capable of teaching their school. They have colleges so munificently endowed by the government that the expenses of a collegiate course are very trifling; yet none but the sons of the rich can get access to them.

I now come to speak of their system of peonage. By a law of Mexico, slaves can not exist there, for the moment they touch Mexican soil, that moment they become free. But they have a system of slavery nearly as bad as that of the United States. If a man is so unfortunate as to become involved in debt, however small it may be, and can not pay it, he is obliged to serve the creditor until the sum is paid. By the adroit management of the latter, and the careless stupidity of the former, this is seldom done. When the interest is calculated, and the expenses of his living, clothing, &c., are added, it may readily be seen his slavery must often be hopeless, although it comes under another name. 'Nor does it end at his death;



for the children are bound by the father's debt, in addition to those they may accumulate for their own support, before they can earn it. They can not be bought and sold, but their debts may be bought, which is tantamount to buying the body. The only feature in which this is distinct from slavery is this: families can not be separated. If a peon is transferred to another person, his family goes with him.

I now wish to speak more fully of their habits of gambling. I witnessed more of it at Amatlan than at any other place. Their most common game is monte, whose mysteries can be learned only by losing at it. The coolness with which a Mexican will lose sum after sum is remarkable, their countenances never changing. Men, women, and children, as soon as they begin to talk, may be seen at the green-cloth table. I here saw the priests, dressed in their sacred robes, gamble with greasy rancheros. Sitting on the curb-stones and in the streets may be seen fellows dirty and almost naked, who have scraped together a few coppers, and are now dealing monte. I have seen men play till they had lost all their money, then gamble their blanket, then their hat, and even the shirt on their back. They would lose all these with apparently perfect and stoical indifference, when at the same time it was probably the last they had. In this manner I have seen a shirt change owners three times in one day.

The character of the Mexicans may be seen at a glance when I say that, morally, it is on a level with the foregoing in every thing, and this is not wonderful; they are not so much to blame, when we consider the example set them by their priests.

Their fandangoes is another thing worthy of notice. Whenever one is decided on, they engage the music, and fire a few rockets, which is equivalent to a general invitation, when old and young flock to the house of dancing. Should this be small, the fandango is held in the yard. A gentleman selects his partner and goes on the floor; liquor is then handed them, of which they drink, and pass it round to all hands. The music then commences, and the dancers step it, not in "the light, fantastic toe" style, but like a regular negro hoe-down, each one trying to excel the other in making the most noise. This is continued till near morning, when all return to their homes, all more or less intoxicated, some beastly, others decently, and others gentlemanly.

At one of these fandangoes my life was put in some danger. It occurred as follows: A young man was there with his wife, a very pretty girl. I danced with her once, and after that sat down by her side to have a little chat. This made the husband jealous; and as he was drunk, he acted without reason. He went home, got his sword, and came back, avowing his determination of killing me, saying that, as to having a Yankee dance with his wife, he would not suffer it. Some one told me of his intentions, and that he was then in the yard, waiting for me to pass out, when he would attack me. I gave them some money to treat him to all he would drink, and paid no more attention to it. When the party broke up, he was so drunk that he could not possibly do me any hurt. But this was not the end of the affair, for he had been very much excited, and now resolved on revenge. In or-



der to obtain it, he carried his sword for several days, in the hopes of having a chance of attacking me un-awares. But I carried one also; and, so long as I was on my guard, he durst not molest me. In a few days his ire appeared to have cooled.

At this time occurred the great celebration of the Carnival. They go round at night, breaking egg-shells on the heads of persons. These are filled with flour, and scented with Cologne, or rose water, or some other rich odor. When it commenced I was standing in the street, idling away the time as best I could, when, all of a sudden, my hat was removed, and a number of these odious shells were broken on my devoted head. Not being aware of the custom, I quickly turned, and, before I was aware of it, had knocked down the man who was guilty of what I considered this insult. A tumult was raised; they threatened to kill me, and perhaps would have done so, had not some one gone after the alcalde. He came and inquired into the matter, then ordered them to let me alone for the future, and took me back to his house. Were it not for my friend Don Jesus Murguir, and the alcalde, I fear I would not have been long in this world; but when I was in difficulty, right or wrong, I was sure of their protection.

This diversion is practiced several nights in succession, varied occasionally by throwing flour in persons' faces. It is followed by the religious season of Lent, which continues forty days; and it is the custom throughout Mexico to have mass, or at least religious service, every morning during all that time. When the festival commenced, the people assembled as usual

in the morning. When they came out of church, I noticed, with some curiosity, that all the people had a cross painted on their foreheads. For what purpose this was done, I could not ascertain. This they wore for one week; and then commenced the processions. One morning I resolved to observe one of these closely, to see all that could be seen. The procession formed in the suburbs of the town, so thither I went. On coming up, I saw the priest mounting a donkey, richly caparisoned, and led by two boys. The streets were strewed with flowers, evergreens, and the finest blankets. This, I suppose, was intended to represent the entry of Christ into Jerusalem. They were attended with music, banners were flying, and rockets were fired. They went through the principal streets, then turned up to the church; but, as they were going through the Plaza, some other donkeys commenced braying, when the one that was rode by the representative of Christ answered it, and started off, notwithstanding the exertions of the boys to prevent him. When he found he had some difficulty in getting away, he began to kick and plunge, and, finally, he threw his priestship off. This scene was so comical and ridiculous, that, had it broken his neck, I could not have avoided smiling, and laughing when I had a better chance. Not so with them, however, for not a smile could be seen on a single face. People were coming in from all parts of the country to witness the ceremonies and to confess, this being the time for a general confession.

At this time I was invited by a gentleman to visit one of his gold mines some ten leagues distant. Our



route was entirely in the mountains, and the scenery was occasionally sublime. Along the sides of the mountains, the path was so narrow that the mule scarcely had room to plant his feet. On one side of us rose a precipice, almost perpendicular, to a great height; on the other side was a dark and unfathomable abyss. About four in the afternoon we came to the Barranca, so named from the fact of its being built in a gulley.

We stopped at the house of a friend. A servant took charge of our beasts, and we were invited to the house. I was soon on familiar terms with the inmates, whom I found far superior to their condition; their manners, intelligence, and the arrangements of their house all bespoke them as belonging to a class superior to those around them. There was in the family a young lady, more beautiful and refined than any I had yet seen in this country, with piercing black eyes, soft auburn hair, and a complexion perfectly white, and an eminently fine form. There was about her a dignity and charming simplicity which rendered her irresistible. A cup of chocolate was given us as a lunch, when the young lady invited me to go into the garden to see her flowers and eat some fruit. This invitation I of course would not refuse. I scarcely believed she was a Mexican, so different was she from the rest of my acquaintances. In the management of her garden I admired her taste as much as her person. So anxious was I to ascertain the history of her family, that I could not restrain from asking if they had always lived here. She said not; and as I appeared to be anxious to learn it, she related the following facts.

Her father had once been rich, and held the commission of general in the army. In some revolution he was deprived of his commission, and his property was confiscated to government. He then moved his family to this retired and secluded spot, and was now engaged in mining operations. We were now called into the house, and during the evening the young lady and her mother played on the harp and guitar, accompanied with their voices. They showed plainly that, whatever their opportunities might have been, they had not been neglected.

Next morning we arose and departed early. Our ride to-day was short, for we came to the mine in two hours. It had been worked to the depth of four hundred feet, and produced, on an average, three ounces per day. I was told it had been worked over a century. The owner employed, in all his operations in this mine, some sixty men, to whom he paid two and three shillings per day. His major-domo, or chief director and overseer, received five hundred dollars per annum. Great caution and watchfulness was requisite to prevent the Mexicans from stealing any of the metal. Toward night we returned to the Barranca, where we arrived soon after dark, and which we left early next morning. After I was in the saddle, the young lady before spoken of came and presented me with a bottle of good wine, remarking that, when I was far away, I must not forget her. We returned by the same route that we had come, and arrived at home about dusk.

This gentleman lived at Garabato, five leagues distant. He encouraged me with hopes of getting in



profitable business in his mine if I would come and live with him. Supposing that the offer was made in good faith, I accepted it. He told me that his overseer was going to leave. This situation I should have accepted, with the object of obtaining money sufficient to carry me home, and, if I was lucky, of remaining till I had accumulated a small pile.

I now bid adieu to my friends in Amatlan, and went to Garabato, where I remained three months. Soon after coming here I found that the offer which had been made me was a mere bubble; the man had no intention whatever of fulfilling his promises.

Garabato is not so large as Amatlan, nor is it so compactly built. The houses were originally built just where it suited their owners, regardless of regularity or order; consequently, the streets are narrow and very crooked, but the country around is fertile and well cultivated, and fruit is raised with great care. A church stands in what they call the square; but, strange to tell, there is no priest in the place. This is a circumstance that I never before observed, even in a small place, and the only solution I could give to the enigma was, that the people were not devout enough to support a priest. Many of the wealthiest informed me that they had not confessed for a great many years, neither had they paid their tithes to the bishop, and their example was followed by the poorer classes. The result of this course was a great falling off in the influence of the priests. The people in general are rather remiss in observing their religious fasts and festivals, and showing, in a manner not to be misunderstood, that the influence of their

great father the pope is utterly lost. During the season of Lent, when in other places they were holding celebrations, and fandangoes were prohibited, here amusements of every kind were freely engaged in.

An incident worthy of note occurred at this time. Some of the people wanted a fandango, and it was necessary for them to get a license from the alcalde; but he, on account of its being a time of festival, refused to give one. This was on Saturday. A report of his refusal was made to Antonio Parra, the gentleman with whom I was then residing. On Sunday he went to his highness and demanded a license; it was again refused. He then called together the ayuntamiento, or common council, and demanded one. His wealth was greater than that of any other man in the place, and, consequently, his influence was greater than even the alcalde's; so the council gave him one without delay. This was early in the morning; rockets were at once fired; the music was got together, and they took the rounds of the village, going first to the alcalde's office, and then to his house, as a mark of triumph and contempt. A barrel of liquor was now brought into the street, and the head knocked in; then all came up and drank, men and women, boys and girls, and in a short time almost the entire town was completely drunk.

The music now went back to the house of the alcalde, when Antonio Parra and this officer fell into a fight. A rush was made on both sides, and the fight became general. An attempt was made by the friends of the alcalde to carry Parra to jail; but he had a great many friends, and to succeed was impossible.



This was the first and last instance in which I ever saw the alcalde's authority directly and successfully resisted. During the whole day and night shouts were heard in favor of Antonio Parra forever. The authority of the alcalde in this place was scarcely regarded. An appeal from him to Parra was generally successful.

I at this place became experimentally acquainted with an animal which is held in great dread by the Mexicans, who call it *alacran*. In English it is scorpion. I was one evening sitting in the door of a house, when I felt something running up my leg under my clothes. Not thinking what it was, I put my hand on it to push it down again, when it stung me just below the knee. The poison was rapidly communicated to my whole body. I experienced a pricking and deadening sort of pain, and felt as though ten thousand fine needles were sticking in my body. My system was, in a great measure, deprived of the power of action. I tried to bleed myself by inserting my penknife in the place that was stung; but no blood appeared, only a little water of a greenish color. I then drank about half a pint of liquor, and, strange to say, it had not the least effect in producing intoxication, as I had hoped, but it lessened the pain considerably.

During the whole night it was impossible for me to sleep. I rolled from side to side in perfect agony. A raging thirst now tormented me. I tried to walk, but could scarcely stand. At length I heard some one stirring, when I crawled to my door, and called for some water. It was brought me; and when I

drank, my throat felt as though it was full of fine long hair, for at every draught that I took the hair seemed to rise on the water and completely choke me. For two or three days I was in great danger, but at the end of the sixth I was entirely well.