

"And you", I enquired with surprise, "can serve with such troops?" — "Nay indeed!" he returned, "I have long since obtained my discharge; but I still occupy myself with military studies, and shall again take service, when military affairs wear a better appearance. I am far from affirming, that the officers of the acting army are not good, on the contrary there are many excellent well informed men amongst them, who would do honour to the profession in any country. But with an army of officers, appointed in the manner I have told you, you may easily conceive that many are not worthy of the name."

"I find that perfectly natural," I returned, "but I was at a loss to comprehend that people, who had at least worn a sword, could commit dishonorable, even criminal actions, without being struck off the list, or having their epaulets publicly snatched from their shoulders by their brother-officers. I recollect now to have read that a colonel was convicted of forging, that captains were named, who distinguished themselves as amateur robbers, that others figured as blacklegs, and that others refused to give satisfaction in affairs of honour. Once even I myself saw an officer's ears repeatedly boxed in a jeweller's shop, for having allowed some rings to stick to his fingers without intending to pay for them. He shook himself, however, and went out as though nothing had happened."

The captain made a queer face, in which vexation and humour strove for the mastery. "That is precisely what I am constantly saying and writing", he continued, "that a great purification is absolutely necessary. What you say, is unhappily too true, that such despicable fellows are on the list, who would be fitting ornaments for the gallows or the house of correction. I cannot understand why the government has not long since struck off all such names, for these rogues do not belong to the actual army; they have no claim on the state, and are constantly crying out for and soliciting their back pay. They are the most useless proletarians, who should be deprived of all hope of support from the state: they can work or starve. Where there is such a total want of education and morality, there can be no talk of honour. Many, very many swear by the great Jack Falstaff, and say with him: 'What is honour? A word; what is a word?' Wind? For such a windy thing as honour they draw no sword, they thoroughly despise the mediæval barbarism of the duel, in which they are supported by the law, and the bold patriot is heroic enough, like the ancient Romans — *fortia agere et pati* — rather to put up with a few blows, than violate the laws, or do homage to a barbarous prejudice. Whoever conceives himself insulted, can go to the magistrates, who you know are paid for the purpose of listening to complaints."

"Here captain, I cannot agree with you", I interrupted, "for without honesty, this appearance of honour is a mere nullity, and in a well-regulated state, duels ought never to be permitted. It is a mistake: for a phantom one is ready to risk everything, life itself, to cast all one's obligations into the scale. Whenever an insult is offered, one must be right, the other wrong, or there must be a misunderstanding. Misunderstandings must be cleared up, and the dispute is at an end; whoever is

proved to be wrong, must have morality, uprightness enough to acknowledge it, and this is certainly a better atonement, than, having insulted an honest man, to send a bullet through his head, because you happen to be a better shot. The *esprit du corps* should suffer none but men of the most spotless honour to be amongst them; and for quarrels, which can never be wholly avoided, courts of honour, composed of the most respected officers, will do more than the sword and pistol."

"I find no reasonable objection to your view of the case, when it concerns a body of officers who are imbued with the feelings and possess the spirit of gentlemen", returned the captain; "but where this '*esprit du corps*' to which you allude is wanting, I keep the fellows off, if they know that they must fight me should they raise my choler. But we will talk of this some other time, for I have constructed my own theory, which differs materially from that of the immortal knight Don Quixote."

"For the present I will keep to the thread of my discourse, and tell you a little more of our military affairs. The influence of Santanna, who for upwards of twelve years did as he pleased with the army, had, as I have already told you, a very bad influence. Some advantages which he obtained at the beginning of his career, during the civil commotions, over his adversaries, impressed him with the belief, that he was possessed of great military talent. He knew nothing of the history of warfare, nor of the science of war in the stricter sense, he was no tactician, knew nothing of engineering, despised all fundamental study, and suffered no man of talent to be near him, who might have introduced a thorough reform into the army. Every battle where, of late years, Santanna commanded in person, was lost by gross mistakes on his part, whilst he afterwards made generals who commanded under him responsible, and had them before a court-martial for gross neglect, of which he alone was guilty. This was especially the case in the late war with the United States. Contrary to the advice of better generals than himself, he marched from San Luis to Saltillo in order to attack Taylor, at an unfavorable season of the year, by the worst roads, through a parched uninhabited waste, many leagues in extent. Want of provisions, of forage for his horses, drought, snow and cold, had completely exhausted the army, and yet he attacked Taylor, who had enjoyed a long rest, and had chosen a good position at Buena Vista."

"For this march through the desert, there was no reason whatever; there was no important military position to cover, no reinforcements were advancing, and he might quietly have waited on his own side of the desert, for his adversary to place himself at a disadvantage by crossing to attack him. In the battle against Scott near Cerro Gordo, Santanna occupied a very difficult pass, and had troops enough to keep the Americans long occupied; but he refused to listen to the advice of one of his engineers who repeatedly called his attention to the weakness of one flank, which might easily have been covered with a few entrenchments; he made no dispositions for a retreat, and placed his cavalry in reserve upon a hill, where it was impossible for it to manœuvre."

"I should never have done, if I were to enter on the details of these battles, and of those that followed. All testify that the most wretched dispositions were the main cause of our ruin. The bravest soldiers can do nothing without a leader. In Cerro Gordo most of the chiefs had disappeared before the position was lost; one captain defended a mountain-path with his company to the last man, and fell like a hero; not the subalterns, not the soldiers were to blame, but the leaders.

"The Mexican soldier goes with great coolness and contempt of death into battle, and endures fatigue and privation without murmuring. His frugality is to be admired. With a little bag of *pinole*, a kind of flour prepared from roasted maize and sugar, and which is mixed in a cup of cold water, he marches for several days without any other food, the ground serving as his couch, and the sky for his covering. He is tractable and attached to his captain, if the latter be imbued with a military spirit, and himself practise the discipline he requires from others. And what might our military not have been, if, as in Prussia, military service were the duty of every citizen. But our recruiting-system has always been a very wretched affair.

"The conscription", continued the captain, "is here not customary, nor is there any regular method of recruiting according to the age, as no exact lists of the population are to be met with in the parishes. When the battalions are reduced by mortality or desertion, so that they can scarcely be regarded as companies, orders are sent by the war-minister to the governors of provinces to complete the numbers. Each battalion has its recruiting district. The general-in-chief asks for the requisite number from the governor, who writes to the prefects for their quota, according to the census of their departments. The prefect orders the under-prefects and local authorities not to remove diligent people from their occupations, but to seize upon the idlers, vagabonds, strollers, drunkards and other notorious rogues (*vagos y mal entretenidos, jugadores, ebrios y sujetos de mala nota*), and to forward them safely escorted. Should the requisite number, however, not be forthcoming, the single men must draw lots in order that the deficiency may be made good.

These recruiting orders invariably cause a panic among the honourable class of vagabonds, who disperse like chaff before the wind, and conceal themselves in forests and ravines, a very easy matter in a country so thinly populated. These orders, therefore, are mostly forwarded in secret, and as the local authorities are bound to send in the requisite number, they quietly look round for fitting subjects. Quite unexpectedly, on some fine evening, they are seized in the gaming-houses, in the streets, or in their houses, by a patrol of the civic guard, kept in safe custody, and the following morning, with their arms tied behind their backs, and fastened two and two, are despatched to the district town.

"In the villages Sunday is the day usually selected, because the people are then generally assembled in the market-place; or they are pressed on Saturday at a dance, which is announced with many rockets, precisely in order to attract the game they are in search of, and who, for the most part, are enthusiasts for similar social entertainments. But who shall describe the trepidation of the merry party,

when the *alcalde* suddenly appears with the guard, occupies the doorways, and selects the gents possessed of the requisite qualifications. The cry: '*leva* (recruiting)' produces greater dismay than an earthquake. Once I saw an old woman hurrying off to the fields, and on asking what was the matter, she replied panting: 'They are recruiting!' — 'Well', said I, 'they'll not take you!' She replied, that it was impossible to tell, and that at all events it was safer to hide.

"When the recruits have reached the district-town, little ceremony is made with them. If they have money, which is rarely the case, or wealthy friends, who will do something for them, their liberation may in most cases be effected; should it be otherwise, they become champions for country, right and freedom. They are now sent forward to the *depôt*, and confined in the barracks, where they find a good school for any description of knavery hitherto unknown to them.

"With this mode of recruiting it necessarily often happens, that not only the actual vagabonds are laid hold of, but that the class of poor devils are ensnared. Where are there not orphans, foundlings, and so forth? In the small villages these must generally take their turn, they are marched off, and no one puts in a word for them, whilst many, who are undeserving of it, escape because they have parents and relations who exert themselves in their favour.

"Troops brought together in such a manner consist chiefly of genuine jail-birds, of rabble who are elsewhere taken under the protection of the state, and lead a pleasant life in the treadmills, houses of correction and other useful establishments. Who can expect honour and patriotism to influence the actions of these warriors: the stick must govern here, and it is employed with little hesitation. By degrees these savages are tamed, and when they are well accustomed to the new order of things, they receive their uniform, and are permitted to go out of barracks in charge of reclaimed vagabonds. The first attempts are always attended with risk, and are frequently followed by desertion. Usually, however, the recruit waits until he meets with a good opportunity of deserting his post; for he then has the advantage of carrying off his arms, the sale of which cover his travelling expences.

"It is hardly possible to conceive how numerous the desertions are after every recruiting, or rather on every possible occasion. They run off by dozens, endeavour to reach the solitudes, or farms far away from the beaten track, where they are sure of work and bread. This is especially the case with troops, who are sent to the coast-garrisons. Orders to march to a sea-port is for the native of the table-lands, almost equivalent to the sentence of death. The instinct of self-preservation, therefore, moves him to watch like a fox, for the best chance of escaping the snare. He quits the high-road, and has now won the game. No one pursues him; and the first night he removes far enough to venture to apply for food at some solitary farm. The people are compassionate, and cannot let the hungry traveller proceed without refreshment. The poor wretch complains of his hard fate, offers to work for his board, and is gladly accepted.

"Once I travelled in the suite of a general, who was escorted by fifteen dragoons and a trumpeter. After journeying three days, the whole escort had vanished, some with the horses, and finally the trumpeter derisively hung up his trumpet on a tree in front of his chief's quarters, and also disappeared. True they were part of a coast garrison, and the sickly season was approaching.

"It had frequently been seen and acknowledged that this method of completing the army was of little avail, and even Santanna endeavoured to introduce recruiting, by means of drawing lots, among young men of good character. He met with insuperable obstacles, partly arising from the unbounded dislike of the Mexicans to military service, partly from the circumstance that the fresh troops could not be mixed up with the old ones, if he desired to train a new generation, and that these class-soldiers could not be trusted apart, in consequence of his being universally disliked. Matters therefore remained as they were. The troops being once habituated to a barrack-life, frequently went on well, and served till old age came on. They became also, as I have already observed, excellent soldiers, fighting as well as Croats or Pandoors, with whom, in many respects, they may best be compared. My opinion, that with good officers a good army might be formed, is shewn by the history of warfare in all times, and therefore my prime object would be to make a careful selection among the officers and chiefs now serving, to send for some distinguished men from the different European states, and cause the art of war to be taught. Our army should be wholly reconstructed. One step was taken, not very long since, owing to which a vast number of officers disappeared from the lists. During the American war all were called upon to defend the country, with the threat that whoever failed to appear at the appointed time, should be considered to have taken his discharge. Not one half made their appearance, and all the absentees were struck off the army list. It was further perceived, that for 25 years the army had been a mere tool for the ambitious plans of unscrupulous generals; but that in case of need it could do nothing in defence of the country; that it was the ruin of Mexico, partly by the enormous expenditure it entailed (from 12 to 15 million dollars annually), partly by its faulty organisation; and the step was ventured upon of reducing it to a minimum. The national-guard was increased, and its statutes amended, military colonies were established on the northern frontier, partly to provide for the proletarians, who were now accustomed to active service, and partly to serve as a rampart against the irruptions of the Indians. All these are innovations, which are not yet completely carried out, which do not yet answer the purpose intended, but nevertheless are a step forward.

"You see, my dear Sir, I have afforded you a glance into our affairs, and have not concealed the weak sides. You will therefore no longer misunderstand what lately passed between me and the licentiate."

The short tropical twilight was over, and the beautiful constellation of the cross shone out superbly in the south over the towers of the city, as we entered the

streets. I heartily thanked my new friend for his information, and we parted highly gratified with each other.

The reading public, however, may not be completely satisfied, and I fancy I perceive many questions hovering on their lips; I will therefore offer a few concluding remarks.

Some years ago, if any one had been present at parade in the great square of Mexico on the occasion of a festival, and had heard one of Meyerbeer or Rossini's marches played, he would scarcely have believed himself on the table-land of the Andes. But on looking better at the soldiers, the dark-brown complexion of very many of them reminded him that he was in another quarter of the earth. The cut of the uniform was half French, half Spanish, sat well, but was exceedingly unpractical for such a country. The tight-fitting cloth uniforms, the white leathers, the heavy covering for the head, protecting neither from sun nor rain, are inconveniences, which are by degrees being got rid of in Europe, but which are quite unfitted for the tropics. The most practical dress would be a short blouse, wide trowsers, and a round hat, turned up a little on one side. The Indian and Mestizo is accustomed from childhood to wear neither waistcoat nor jacket, the uniform therefore restrains the freedom of his movements, and answers a contrary purpose to what is intended. This refers to the infantry. The cavalry might be equal to any in the world, if the existing elements were properly employed. The Mexican rides and is accustomed to the management of horses from youth upwards, moves with the greatest ease, whatever may be the nature of the country, and is a perfect master of the lance and the lasso. But he must have his convenient Mexican saddle and bridle, and a uniform corresponding with the picturesque riding-costume of the country. No attention has been paid to this. The Mexican sits badly in Hungarian and French saddles, such as are introduced for the army; the heavy head-piece, the tight red uniform and light blue trowsers inconvenience him sadly, and the same man, who with his own riding-equipage and national costume is as much at his ease as a circus-rider, makes no impression, is stiff and awkward. The horses of the country should be employed for light cavalry only. The Mexican breed is fiery and enduring, but of middling size only, unfitted for dragoons and cuirassiers.

For a long time the army was the expensive luxury of Mexico — the hobby of the presidents, who nearly all belonged to the military profession. The garrison-service of the capital, which might just as well be performed by a national guard, numbers several battalions, and precisely these have the most elegant uniforms. They have extensive barracks, which are not exactly models of cleanliness. The men are not sufficiently occupied and drilled, gymnastic exercises are unknown, nor are there classes for instruction. Their idle life leads them to numerous excesses, the soldier continues his proletarian mode of life, and forms connections highly disadvantageous to discipline. If a battalion has to change its garrison, it is followed by a troop of women and children, more numerous than the battalion itself; they even

follow the soldiers to the field, hindering the manœuvres, consuming the provisions, and facilitating desertion.

All these evils have been repeatedly acknowledged by discerning officers, and proposals made for their abolition; but it is extremely difficult to effect innovations, because the best will of individuals is insufficient to overcome the inertness of the mass. The mixed population is also in the way. The Indians are attached to the soil, like the domestic animals to their stable, but they have no patriotism. They will not move unless by compulsion, their lives and way of thinking are stereotype, they find it impossible to extend the limited circle of their ideas.

The war with North America afforded the most distinct evidence of this. There was no talk of a popular rising, for the Indians remained wholly indifferent; in the larger cities only, some of the educated Creoles displayed a lively interest in the result. If the people had risen in defence of their country, Scott's army would have been annihilated. Old Elias Taylor advanced as a cautious soldier, carefully secured the possibility of retreat, and protected his flanks. But Scott penetrated from Vera Cruz into the interior by the sole high-road, across a difficult country, with numerous narrow passes, across a chain of mountains rising from ten to twelve thousand feet above the sea, some seventy leagues distant from his reserves and supplies. He would have been cut off from the coast, an insignificant guerilla party could have intercepted his communications, he must have been lost if the somewhat numerous population of the plateaux had united to attack him, or had refused to supply his wants. An incomprehensible military mistake turned out luckily for Scott; for more than a month he was left unmolested in this critical position, and had leisure to bring up his ammunition and reinforcements, and again take the offensive. The laurels which Scott gained, were owing less to his tactics and bravery, than to the weakness and indolence of his opponent. In the decisive struggle near the capital, several divisions of Mexicans fought with great bravery and resolution, namely at Churubusco; but the favorable moment was lost, the chief command without energy, and what was worse, without confidence, on account of its being in the hands of Santanna, who was incapable of exciting the least spark of enthusiasm.

The experience of late years force upon us the conviction, that the Indian population are unfit for war, as long as their intellectual development is not more cared for. They have therefore been as much as possible exempted from service, even in the national-guard, and doubtless the consideration may have had some weight, that it would not be altogether adviseable to arm this numerically larger portion of the population, who have not wholly forgotten that they were once the dominant race.

In general it is the Spanish-speaking portion of the inhabitants who have to bear arms, consequently the Creoles and Mestizoes, and as these have the greatest objection to military service, there will never be a good militia. In the state of Durango for instance, which for some years has had much to suffer from the Apaches, and still suffers, three hundred well-mounted men cannot be brought together; and these would be sufficient to seek the savages in their mountain-lairs, and render them

for ever innoxious. These predatory tribes never appear in large numbers; they come like the wind, thirty or fifty strong, attack the farms and villages, murder the men, carry off the women and children, and flee, driving the herds of cattle and troops of horses before them, as quickly as they came. The whole state trembles at this plague, mining and agriculture are at a stand-still, because nobody ventures to go far from the towns, and still there is not sufficient unity of purpose, to equip an efficient troop capable of protecting the general interests. For the very thinly populated state of Durango there may be some excuse owing to the great distance of the inhabited places from each other; but in the districts which are better populated the same thing is observed, which can naturally be caused by nothing but the most disgusting selfishness. If the people would act in concert, these annoyances would shortly cease; but every one fears to put himself forward, he has no wish to be on bad terms with any one; and even the authorities do not act 'ex officio', partly for want of support, partly fear for of incurring the hatred of the culprits.

This is not alike in all parts of the country; in the state of Vera Cruz, for instance, no suspicious people can settle, as the villagers and peasants quickly combine to hunt them down. In this state alone the guerillas fought incessantly against the North Americans, cut off many a convoy of food and ammunition, and hindered their operations by attacking them whilst on the march. Here, too, the Indians took no part in the struggle, but like jackals, prowled about the enemy's camp by night, to carry off their horses from the pasture.

XVIII.

THE PROLETARIANS OF MEXICO.

The Mexican cities have their numerous and peculiar proletarians, as well as Naples and Seville; and the well-known lazzaroni have perhaps more skill in devouring maccaroni, but will scarcely represent their class so worthily as the Leperos (also called Pelados) in the west. In Europe it is very hard to be obliged to belong to this class, in Mexico it is deliberately chosen; no pressure of circumstances can hinder