

These people can seldom read or write, and receive no instruction whatever. When they intend marrying, they must know part of the catechism by heart, and must, therefore, when the time comes, be crammed up to the mark. They are not fond of hard work; nor have they any need of it, as they have plenty to live upon, if they devote only a few hours a day to agricultural labour. They are good hunters, know the haunts of the deer and wild-boars, and track the wild turkey. The men tan the deer-skins remarkably well, dye them, and make their clothes of them; the women spin and weave cotton. During half the year, there is little or nothing to be done in the field; the chase is then attended to, or the fibres of the long-leaved *bromelia pita*, or of the maguey are prepared, or cordage and ropes made of it, and sent to market. In other localities they collect copal, storax, and Peruvian balsam, the fruits of the oil-palm, pimento or vanilla in the forests. Many days, however, are passed extended on the mat, playing the guitar, sleeping, or staring up at the blue sky; the report of a festival in the neighbourhood, however, electrifies them; the prospect of a fandango makes dandies of them, they bathe and anoint themselves, and are then indefatigable in song and dance.

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**XXIII.****THE CATTLE-BREEDERS AND HERDSMEN.**

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The lands of the haciendas, as we have already remarked, are partly too large to be devoted to agriculture alone, partly unfit for cultivation, being sometimes stony, arid, or steep mountains. Such tracts are, if possible, devoted to cattle-breeding. In the coast regions and in the northern provinces of the country, the population is insufficient for agricultural purposes; many hundred square miles of the most fertile soil would be completely useless to the proprietors, if they were not employed for pasturage, which can be attended to by a few herdsmen. But in addition to the force of circumstances, the Mexican is fond of cattle-breeding, because it feeds him without hard work, enables him to indulge his taste for a Bedouin life, and to be on horseback as often and as long as he pleases. This is why, in addition to the great cattle-breeders, there are so many rancheros who carry on cattle-breeding on small farms. In the villages that have lands of their own, almost every one has some dozen cows, mares, sheep or goats at pasture; it is a description of luxury, bringing

little pecuniary increase, but is regarded by the people as something to fall back upon in case of need. The animals cost nothing to feed, they increase without requiring any attention, therefore why should they not be kept?

This custom is, however, in many respects injurious to agriculture; the diligent planter is forced carefully to fence in his plantations, which is attended with trouble and expence, without thoroughly securing them, as the animals manage to break through occasionally, in spite of every care. The goats injure the orchards by gnawing off the bark, and even the swine commit much damage by grubbing up the grass. Wherever agriculture predominates, the cattle-breeder must be responsible for the damage his beasts commit. In less populous districts this is not possible, the rule there being, that the farmer must protect himself against the cattle, and this being difficult, agriculture makes no progress. This is especially the case in the northern states, and in the warmer regions towards both seas.

In the Tierra caliente sheep and goats do not thrive. The great quantity of prickly plants become entangled to such an extent in the wool, that it is completely spoiled; and during the rainy season the humidity is such, that the foot-rut and other diseases carry them off. With horse and cattle-breeding the result is quite different. The horses of the Tierra caliente are indeed not so hardy as those of the plateaux, hence the proverb: "En tierra caliente, ni caballos ni gente (in the hot regions, the horses and the people are good for nothing)."

The horned cattle are left entirely to nature; like the deer in a park, they seek their own pasture, keep together in herds or families, and choose favorite spots, to which they invariably return. According to the season, their instinct leads them to pasture, during the rainy season in the savannahs, during the dry months in the shady forests. These animals, however, are not wild, they do not shun man, and every head is marked.

The different pasture-grounds of a hacienda, termed *potreros*, are under the care of herdsmen (*vaqueros*), each man having usually from 500 to 800 head of cattle to look after. These herdsmen know all their beasts, and are known by them, so that when they appear in the pasture, or cry "toma, toma (take)" they run after them in crowds. The means by which the herdsman attracts his subjects is salt; he always has a bag of salt hanging from his saddle, some of which he occasionally strews on a large stone, or sometimes drops on the tongue of a favorite cow.

All the Mexican cowherds are mounted, partly because it is impossible to survey such extensive tracts on foot, partly because they often require a fleet horse, to catch stragglers. Frequently the animals injure themselves, the bulls fight, a sharp thorn, or a beast of prey (jaguar, puma, or wolf) wounds them, and as in the hot regions the flesh-fly lays its eggs in the wound, the assistance of the herdsman is indispensable. He therefore constantly has his lasso with him, made of leather, or of the fibres of the maguey. At full gallop he pursues the flying animal, casts the noose about its neck, quickly turns his horse's head, and drags the struggling prisoner to the nearest tree, to which it is soon bound. In a moment he has dismounted, has

cast a second noose about the hind-feet, and with one jerk the heaviest beast is extended on the ground; the hind and fore-feet are quickly tied together, and now the surgical operation can be performed at leisure.

These herdsmen are the best horsemen that can be met with; it is often wonderful how they can gallop under low trees, through dense wood, lying on the horse's neck, and yet cast the lasso with the greatest precision. They are as venturesome as indefatigable in their dangerous profession, and if incited by emulation, their feats of horsemanship are equal to those exhibited in the circus.

The vaquero always lives in the middle of his pasture-grounds, near a watering-place, and has a strong enclosure of stone or logs (*corral*), into which the herd can be driven. The calves are taken thither, when some days old, and tied up under a shed. Instinct leads the cows twice a day to the enclosure, to give their young the required nourishment. Part of the milk is withdrawn, and this is done more for the sake of taming both cow and calf, and to accustom them to man, than for the sake of the milk. After two months the calf is set at liberty, but it is now accustomed to the place, and remains, especially if it be driven once a week with the herd to the enclosure to receive a little salt.

Few haciendas have regular dairies for preparing cheese; butter is only churned in the neighbourhood of the larger towns. The owner of such an estate, mostly leaves the profit arising from the milk, wholly or in part to the herdsmen, in order to induce them to devote their attention to taming the calves. In the whole country, the cows never suffer themselves to be milked without the calf, which must always begin to suck before the cow can be milked.\* In spite of the vast number of cows, therefore, it often happens that not a single glass of milk can be had at the great farms; and the European desirous of quenching his thirst with a draught of new milk, cannot comprehend it, when the herdsmen says: "I have no calf tied up."

In the states on both coasts there are estates, which possess from 10,000 to 20,000 head of horned cattle. Some of them cannot procure herdsmen enough, and part of the cattle become half wild; the calves are not tamed, the beasts receive no salt, and cannot be driven into the enclosure. On the approach of man they fly like deer, and stratagem is requisite, to obtain possession of them. For this purpose a number of tame oxen are kept in every hacienda, termed *cabestros*, which are generally used for conveying the wild cattle, a wild animal being attached to a tame one. If wild cattle are to be caught, a number of these tame oxen are driven to the spot where they are likely to be at pasture. Their wild colleagues soon come out of the bush and join company. A troop of horsemen begin to drive them slowly; the tame oxen immediately proceed to the corral or enclosure; the wild ones follow them, and are easily caught. Occasionally an unusually large bull is shot, the flesh salted and the hide disposed of. On the haciendas, however, which are

\* In Northern Africa (for instance, in Algiers), the same thing is met with among the Arab and Kabyle cattle-breeders.

well managed, the cattle must suffer themselves to be driven easily into the corral, and often receive salt. Once a year all the cattle in the *vaqueria* are driven in; the young beasts which are not yet branded, are now marked, and the number of the stock carefully noted. This is an important festival with the herdsmen, and is called *Herradero*. The country-people joyfully anticipate it for months in advance.

As but few of the herdsmen can write, they keep an account of the calves born, with a kind of tally. This is a broad, untanned strap, on one side of which the male calves, on the other the female calves are registered by notching. Another strap registers those which have died, or been sold, and these tallies are handed over in autumn when stock is taken.

The great profit in cattle-breeding is from the sale of oxen and old cows to the butcher. The quantity of meat consumed in the country is very considerable, as fewer vegetables are eaten than in Europe, and fish, except on the coast — are rare. Every labourer is accustomed to eat meat daily, and he can do it, as it is the cheapest food.

The *ranchero* usually slaughters his fat cattle himself, and makes *sesina* or *tasajo* of it. He cuts all the flesh, namely, into strips about four fingers in breadth, half an inch thick, and several feet in length. It is then well strewed with fine salt, and with the juice of some dozen of lemons; the whole mass being wrapped up over night in the hide. The next day, as soon as the sun is high enough, the strips are hung up on lines, and thoroughly dried by the air and sun. The process is finished in some days; it is then packed in bales, and sent to market. Vast quantities of this dried flesh are consumed in the country, for it is savoury, keeps well, and is soon prepared, it being only necessary to lay a piece on the coals and roast it.

The herdsman is a confidential man, and his position much esteemed among the country-people. The chief herdsman, who has to superintend several *vaquerias*, is termed *Mayoral* or *Caporal*; he must be the proprietor's right hand; he attends to the sale of the cattle, supplies the herdsmen with salt, visits the different *hatos* and controls the herdsmen. He is consulted in all matters relating to the herd, he knows whether certain operations are to be performed during the crescent or decrescent moon, he is the only one who knows how to cure the diseases of the animals, he is an excellent horseman, he selects and breaks in the young horses, he is not only most minutely acquainted with the theory of the saddle, but can also alter those which are faulty, so that they may not press, he shoes the horses extremely well, and speaks about the qualities of a good horse, about the best races of the country and their distinguishing characteristics more learnedly than a professor. It is amusing to hear one of these *mayorals* speak; for he is the living chronicle of the whole neighbourhood, and is acquainted with the genealogy of the biped and quadruped races from the most remote periods. The reader must imagine a tall, broad-shouldered man, with sinewy arms, bare breast, and sunburnt face, but evidently a white Creole. The grey beard leads us to suppose him about sixty years of age; but the eye is

full of life, and he manages a restless young horse with the same indifference as if he were seated on a block of wood.

"Well Tio (*uncle*, a familiar way of addressing elder persons)" we enquire, "how is the colt?" — "Pretty well, Sir, pretty well; something can be made of him." — "Is it for sale." — "No, Sir, it must remain in our own pasture. My son, Joseph, you know him, Sir, is on the look out (*esta campeando*), and is about throwing the lasso (in other words, to marry), therefore I am breaking in this animal for him, so that he may appear respectably." — "And has he already found what he seeks?" — "Yes, Sir, he is on the track; see, there he comes, neighing like a colt; no doubt he has made a successful throw, etc."

The herdsmen are faithful servants of the house, who accompany and protect their master, when on a journey, who fetch him when he visits his farms, and with whom he advises in business affairs, as with members of the family. When he visits the herdsmen, he is served with the best that the house affords, fresh milk, wild honey and fruits; a kid is soon slaughtered, or if there are many guests, a calf. The best pieces are roasted on little spits at the fire, which burns in the middle of the house, whilst the women crush maize and bake bread. The meal is taken seated on a mat, without knife and fork, the fingers doing duty, the bread being handed round in clean little baskets of palm-leaves. The herdsman and his family do not eat with their master, but respectfully wait upon him.

After the meal, business is spoken of; the number of milch-kine, the fat oxen and the state of the pasture commented upon. The master examines the list of births and deaths, and has the certificates of death handed in, namely a piece of hide with the owner's brand, or a slit ear. The herdsman has a story to relate about every death, how guided by the flight of the vultures, he found the carcase, which had been bitten by a *palanca* (*trigonocephalus*, a highly poisonous snake), or bore the marks of the sharp teeth of a jaguar. He then describes the chase of the wild beast, praises the speed of his horse and the boldness of the dogs, who wag their tails on hearing themselves named.

The master often remains all night with his *vaquero*, who then prepares a couch for him of mats covered with deer-skins and soft sheep-skins; the gay *sarape*, which he wears on festive occasions only, is spread over all, and the chinks of the wooden walls are hung with bullocks' hides, in order that the draught may not inconvenience the honoured guest.

Like the herdsmen in their primitive simplicity, live also many *rancheros* and farmers, who attend to their own little herd, often mixed up with those of the owner of the soil. They mostly cultivate a small plot of land in a ravine or in the forest, and assist the *vaquero*, when unoccupied. The number of these *rancheros* in the country is considerable; but though leading a solitary life, and scattered over a vast extent of country, they have much *esprit de corps*, and suffer no suspicious character