

Furnished with his tools, some candles and powder, the old gnome issues forth, clambers about the precipices and ravines, hammers here and there, and if he discovers a vein, knocks off a little of the ore. With this he endeavours to do business with novices in mining. "Sir, I have discovered a mine, not that I want to cry it up, but there is no ore equal to it in the place, what noble *pinta* (silver ore). There must be an overwhelming mass of it. Just the same as the *veta madre*." The Mexican miners call the chief mine of a district, the mother-mine, and ignorant people believe that it runs through the whole country. I have often heard it said: "That is certainly the mine of Guanajuato", even when it was a hundred leagues distant. "When the ore-seeker has praised all the good qualities of his mine, he takes out a piece of ore, blows on it, in order to freshen it up, and lets it sparkle in the light. "How beautiful", he exclaims, "nothing but red silver ore, and that quite on the surface, where all is decomposed. How must it be when one gets deeper! The thing is done with a trifle, with a few hundred dollars a fortune may be made, for so rich a mine as this is not easily to be met with!" The bait takes. The honest tradesman had quite made up his mind to have nothing to do with mines, but to stick to his shop, or at the utmost to buy silver at a profit of 12 per cent; but as other curious people enter the shop, praise the ore, and ask all sorts of questions, he gradually fancies that he has stumbled upon a prize, and would be an ass not to benefit by it. He therefore winks at the cateador to make him understand that he is not to reveal too much, who, in his turn, casts a longing side-glance at the brandy-bottle, which is at once understood. He is treated to a full glass of the best, and it is soon arranged that a sample of at least 25 pounds of ore is to be fetched from the new layer, which is to be proved by the shopkeeper's friend, the master *Azoquero* (amalgamator), the first metallurgic authority. Eventually there is some talk as to the proprietorship of the mine; the finder, of course, reserves a share for himself, and the situation of chief overseer, and the business is in good train.

Of ten cases of the kind, scarcely one is successful; the prudent merchant is security for a few hundred dollars, and this not sufficing, he withdraws from the affair. Others continue the speculation, often with the best result. The professional miner (*minero*) never loses hope; mining is with him a passion like play, no loss frightens him, he devotes his last farthing to the mine, even though uncertain whether he can pay for his breakfast, and is convinced that fortune will befriend him in the course of the day.

We have known many such examples, and have wondered at the infinite confidence of the speculators. We knew one, who might be regarded as a model, sometimes rich, sometimes poor, always an inveterate miner. Sometimes he was seen on foot, poorly clad, on the way to his mine, carrying with him a few candles and a little bag of powder. Sometimes in superfine clothes, on a noble steed, followed by his servant; sometimes his house was well furnished, and at another time it contained little save a deal table and a bench of the same material. Once even he had sold his bed, and like Margery Daw, slept upon straw: he had nothing more to dispose of, and had no credit. He wanted powder, however, and

was firmly convinced that this particular day would be a lucky one. He therefore carried off his old mother's bed and sold it. The good old woman was inconsolable, when she missed her couch in the evening; but the son quieted her with the assurance, that she should have a better one the ensuing day. The next morning he hastened to his mine, to see whether ore had been discovered by the night-task, and was received by the workmen with hearty cheers: they had been eminently successful, and he was able to keep faith with his mother. After innumerable ups and downs, he at length conquered fortune, and although unable to enjoy it long himself, left his children amply provided for.

Whoever has lived in these mining districts, must have had frequent opportunities of seeing remarkable changes of fortune, and the history of Mexican mining offers innumerable examples. We knew a simple smelter, who with his sons worked a small mine, in hopes, by the sale of the ore, to have his day's labour paid for. Fortune smiled upon him, the mine turned out very productive, and in ten years, the poor labourer had an annual income of more than a hundred thousand dollars. It not unfrequently happens, however, that enormous wealth is thrown away as rapidly as it is acquired. The Mexicans bear misfortune better than good fortune. Most of them, when in possession of a large sum, do not invest it well, but thoughtlessly waste it, relying upon their luck: indeed, it is not a rare occurrence, that the same persons, who bet thousands upon a fighting-cock or a card, have some years later to struggle with extreme indigence. They console themselves with having already enjoyed, and with having gained experience, which they forget as soon as fortune smiles on them again.

In the mining-town of Tasco, a man named Patino had a small foundry, where strange ores were crushed on the usual terms. He was considered a good amalgamator, who could manage to live, but nothing beyond that. An Indian, who occasionally supplied him with coals, once brought him a little bag of ore, which he had found in the forest, near his coal-pits, and begged him to assay it. Patino promised compliance; but whenever the Indian, Miguel José, enquired about it, he invariably found the specimens lying in the same corner. At length Patino was induced to assay the ore, and found to his surprise, that it was of the best quality. When the coal-merchant came again, he was told that the ores were not bad, and that if he would bring more of it, it should be crushed, and the profit divided. Miguel was content, took some tools with him, and promised soon to bring more. The next day he announced that he had enough to load twelve mules; the mine was now hired by the two, and yielded in a few years a profit of three million dollars. How did they employ their wealth? Patino became a passionate gamester and spendthrift. Without reflecting that his luck might change, without putting by a penny, he scattered his money profusely; but when the mine became worse, when an advance was called for, he made debts, gradually lost everything, was glad in his declining years to accept a paltry situation as amalgamator, and died so poor, that the workmen were obliged to bury him by subscription. — The Indian José also lived in a ridiculously extravagant manner; he caused his horses to be shod with silver, built

magnificent houses, furnished them splendidly, rioted and wasted: but at the same time made some provision for the future. He opened a retail business, with a fine stock in trade, put by sufficient capital to carry it on with, and when the mine was exhausted, had enough left to live quite at his ease.

Similar stories are connected with the names of La Borde, Obregon, Romero, Fagoaga, Flores and many others, names formerly borne by the nobles, during the Spanish rule. Nearly all have become poor, after having been the wealthiest men in the world, their palaces are in ruins, or have passed into strange hands. In the friendly little town of Cuernavaca is the house dwelt in by Joseph de la Borde during his latter years; the large garden with its stiff arches and fountains, shews that it was laid out at a most tasteless period, but at an immense expence. Now all is neglected and in ruins, and close by is a church, the walls of which are unfinished. Perhaps the walls will be built up by a miracle. Joseph de la Borde had left house, garden and capital to the town, with the obligation to complete the church which he had begun; but the capital is gone, house and garden bring in nothing, and fall to ruin like the church. La Borde was one of the most fortunate miners that ever existed; at several periods of his life, and in different places, he discovered immense wealth in mines, and invariably became poor again. When in funds, he built fine churches, like that at Tasco, founded hospitals, made donations to the clergy, and often had to begin over again. In old age he was once more favored by fortune at Sombvereta; he desired to leave his wealth to his son, and therefore induced his only daughter to take the veil. The son, however, turned monk, and the child of fortune ended his days in melancholy solitude.

Once, too, we saw the owner of the mine of Valenciana in Guanajuato, who was long one of the richest men in the country, now a poor unhappy, blind old man. These are the chances to which the *minero* is subjected.

The miners are thoughtless from their earliest youth. They risk their lives as often as they go down, but they see the danger no longer, having been accustomed to it from boyhood. Their fortunes rise and fall with those of the mine; if this yields well, the miner earns immensely, especially where his wages consist in a share of the ore. It is nothing uncommon for a single workman to earn some hundred piastres in the week, and, when the mines of Catorce in the state of San Luis Potosi were most productive, many of the miners are said to have earned even as much as a thousand dollars a week. Though these may be considered as exceptions only, the miner's wages are higher than those of other labourers. But to find a man amongst the miners in good circumstances, or one who puts by some of his earnings every week, in order to make sure of a small capital, is as difficult as for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven. The money burns a hole in the miner's pocket; during the whole week he has not seen the sunlight, and now, on Sunday, he means to enjoy it thoroughly. He hardly knows what to do with himself for excitement. He buys rockets and lets them off in broad daylight, he drinks, dances, plays, bets at the cock-fight, he buys things of no earthly use, in short so manages as to get rid of every farthing of his earnings before the Sunday is over, and on Monday is

forced to buy bread on trust. It has happened before now, that a miner has betted a thousand dollars on a cock, or that he has spent several hundreds in jewels for his sweetheart. Sometimes they buy clothes of the finest cloth, or treat their comrades to the most expensive wines. A miner once asked the price of some broad gold lace; and on being told by the merchant that it was too dear for him, immediately bought the whole, cut it to pieces with his knife, and flung it into the street.

Unlike the agriculturists, who are for the most part friendly and polite, especially towards their employers, the miners are arrogant and surly. They are always inclined to opposition, always squabble about their wages. Labouring constantly in dark passages, secluded from the world, hardens their characters. Ignorant in the highest degree in everything not pertaining to their craft, they are inclined to superstition and fanaticism. They believe in mountain-sprites, and hear them hammering far down in the bowels of the earth. They have also presentiments, and refuse to admit women into the mine, as the ore would then disappear. The miner provides himself with charms, and returns thanks to this or that saint, for having preserved his neck on this or that occasion. He frequently promises his patron-saint a consecrated taper, which is lighted on the altar in the mine, or in the church.

A good round sum is spent by the miners every year in church-festivals, besides every Saturday, on receiving their pay, half a real (threepence) for masses. When in full work they do not mind this. They are not over particular about the amount of their household expenditure; but the wife must see that the civil-list is provided for, before the man proceeds to the gaming-table.

The miners are in the highest degree jealous, but at the same time not the most faithful husbands. On Sundays, when excited with drink, they frequently quarrel, mostly about the fair sex, and sometimes wind up with the knife. The female sex is sufficiently loose, which is invariably the case where the men are lax in their morals. That the education of the children is much neglected, is a natural consequence; the girls follow in the footsteps of the mothers, and the boys take to the mines, as soon as they are able to descend the shafts, where they hear little calculated to improve them. In this respect the mining-towns are not all alike; the morality of the people depends on the facility of making money, and consequently on the yield of the mines. The morals suffer most, when the discovery of a rich mine in some desert spot, suddenly, and as if by magic, assembles a population, where a short time before nothing was to be met with but wild beasts. The workmen hurry thither to earn more than they could do at home. At first, light huts are constructed with branches, as a provisional shelter against wind and weather. The miners are followed by the small traders, who supply bread, brandy, tobacco and other requisites at high prices. The *ranchero* brings a fat bullock or two, and a few sheep ready for the butcher, field-kitchens are arranged under a tall tree, or in a neighbouring cave, smoke rises everywhere, as from an encampment or bivouac. By degrees a few better cottages are built on speculation, a small shop is established, and does a thriving business, for all the miners leave a great part of their earnings there.

A few weeks pass, and on Sundays an animated market is held. Maize, beans

and Spanish pepper are brought thither in masses, fruits of all kinds, according to the season and locality, oranges, apples, pears, peaches, bananas, pine-apples etc. Fruit is a necessary of life for the Mexican, every labourer lays in a stock on Sunday, so that he may have his orange every day, or his *chirimoya*. Meanwhile the first provisional diggings are increased and replaced by more substantial ones, a foundry is erected near the brook, whole strings of mules come and go, laden partly with building-materials, partly with provisions, returning with ore. Rows of small cottages are now ready for the workmen, larger ones start up for the overseers, and in less than two months several hundred families are settled. On Sunday they desire to hoar mass, and as it is well paid for, the nearest priest comes, even though the distance should be twenty or thirty miles. At first divine service is performed in the open air, and at the same time the foundation stone of a little chapel is laid. Should the mine continue to supply rich ore, galleries are soon run in various directions, fresh mines are sought after and opened, so that the population continues to increase. The amount of money in circulation is extraordinary, and although every necessary of life is exceedingly dear, no one objects, as the requisite funds are so easily obtained. The scum of society is soon well represented, professed gamblers, usurers, thieves and fences; necessity calls forth laws, and the choice of a magistrate introduces something like order. Should energetic men obtain the upper hand, who insist on purifying the society, the best foundation for the future welfare of the settlement is laid.

In the course of a year, a rich mine will often assemble a population of several thousand persons. Traffic is the first adjunct of mining, and subsequently when the required workshops for carrying on the enterprise are well established, agriculture begins to be thought of. Every little valley, capable of cultivation, every gentle slope is planted, so that, at least, the most indispensable vegetables may be near at hand. Flocks of goats clamber about the rocks, and oxen are fattened for the shambles in enclosed pastures.

No branch of labour is so well calculated as mining to assemble the various classes of society. Trade and commerce, agriculture and cattle-breeding appear first as ministering agents, in order to furnish the population labouring in the bowels of the earth with the necessaries of life. The miners, however, bring forth the *nervus rerum*, which, like a powerful magnet, attracts and animates. At length come the arts and sciences, bestowing civilisation on the shapeless mass, producing order in the chaos, introducing mind into that which could hitherto be regarded as matter only. Shooting up overnight like a huge fungus, a mining-town affords us an image of the organic life of human society, elsewhere developing itself slowly, but according to the same laws.

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