

him. He clung to me as a child to its parents. Others are faithfully seeking the light. Students are spending hours in searching the Scriptures. The dawn is breaking. The Sun of Righteousness appears. May His beams soon fall on all this darkened land!

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## VII.

## OUT AT SEA.

Leaving Shore.—A hot Companion.—Parallel Mountains.—Parks and Divides.—Hacienda of Bocas.—Gingerbread Pigs.—A ragged Boy Apollo.—Marriageless Motherhood.—The Widow's Reply.—Sierra Prieto.—Mortevillos.—Reveling in the Halls of Montezuma.—Strife of Beggars.—Dusty Reflections.—Venada.—Chalcos.—The Worship of the dying Wafer.

To launch out from San Luis Potosi is like leaving the Irish shore for America, or Halifax for Europe. You feel that you have got fairly to sea. San Luis is the last of the group of central capitals, lying nearest the north, yet identified in its location and life with the cities lying not far below. Zacatecas, farther to the north, may claim like kindred, but not as close. The five towns of Queretaro, Guanajuato, Leon, Guadilajara, and San Luis Potosi are a sort of central league. To push above the latter, especially on the road to Monterey, is like swinging out into another country. It is four days to Saltillo, with no town of importance intervening; four days of reported peril from robbers and greater peril from the fears of robbers. If a sense of loneliness comes over one when he rounds Cape Clear and steers straight into the harsh Atlantic, even though he is facing, and moving toward, home, so may a like sense affect one as he turns his back on the real Mexico of population, history, and power, and moves northward and homeward from San Luis Potosi. Especially would this loneliness deepen if in his case he were a solitary traveler. It is like crossing the ocean with no fellow-passenger. That abyss is yet more abysmal. One is then apt to feel and to quote the dreary lines:

"It is not grief that makes me moan;  
It is that I am all alone."



Such might have been my feelings as I entered the coach at four this morning; for although I found another passenger there, I was as far apart from him as Nimrod's leaders found themselves from each other, all of a sudden, on the plains of Shinar. And at the end of a single posta, we separated in body, as we had already been in tongue, and I was actually left in the Selkirk condition. I made a pillow of the coach side till morning, not letting solitude destroy slumber. The road was easy, and the sleep not much broken. At sunrise we change horses at a little cluster of huts, dignified with the stately Spanish name of La Estansuela. It is remarkable, this swell of names over nothing. The land is full of it in many other ways.

Here we commenced climbing the slight ridge that limits on this side the beautiful valley of San Luis. All the ridges so far are slight, but all exist. The divides are of various breadths, from two to five miles, are barren, dry, stony, but with irrigation from the surrounding hills could be turned into blossoming gardens. The cactus grows wild over them, and the maguey, showing the capacity of the soil, and its readiness to yield to suitable culture.

The sun breaks in upon us with a fierce glare, like a lion on his prey. He says, evidently, "You want a companion; I'll be a good deal more of one than you desire." There is anger in his eye, like the blistering risings of the heated term in the North. He is as good as his word. A hotter day I have not seen in Mexico or elsewhere.

The mountains range on either side of the road from three to five leagues distant, and never approach it much nearer. You are sure they will shut you in ahead, they look so near; but a sharper or a nearer view shows a gap perpetually opening, and through that gap you are constantly passing. It is indeed no gap, but the mere line of the uneven parallel. How far it may continue I have yet to learn. It has been with me so far ever since leaving Mexico, and especially uniform this side of Queretaro. In fact, it seems a trait of the land, the side journey of a hundred and fifty miles to Leon being a perpetual path between lofty ranges of hills, from ten

to twenty miles apart. These divides open into lower parks, circular or oblong, of various sizes, some embracing a hundred square miles, some sixty, some forty, some ten. These parks are usually cultivated, especially in their lower levels, where they can most easily command the needful irrigation. They are beautiful, as seen from the low ridge that incloses them on the north and south, and when under culture are beautiful on closest inspection. Otherwise their parched and wild condition mars their countenance, on a nearer view.

The first divide north of the San Luis Valley on this road opens upon the hacienda of Bocas, or Mouths, as pretty a spot to the eye as one would wish to see. It is a bit of park, full of trees in full leaf, fields of wheat and barley intensely green, and contrasting wonderfully richly with the surrounding nakedness. The drawing up to this hacienda and halting do not improve its effect. The human aspect is not equal to the earthly. It is the more earthly. Boys and old women and men are busy at this early hour in begging for their daily bread. I invested a cuartillia (three cents) in ginger-snaps, cut into the shape of pigs, a favorite form of that gingerbread here, for which three cents I received eighteen of the gingerbread pigs aforesaid. Having been treated so liberally, I felt inclined to treat others liberally, and so dispensed my swinish favors to the boys and girls scattered around.

One boy was especially attractive; he wore his ragged zerape over his naked shoulders, a feat somebody was laughed at for saying Apollo did; but this brown boy Apollo did it. It was in tatters and small at the start, but he wore it as a king. A like ragged girdle was worn in an equally stately manner. He had his kite ready for flying, and was as perfect a model of boy as ever sat to an Italian artist. How Eastman, who painted the "Barefoot Boy," would have delighted to have this ragged, royal, three-fourths naked little scamp sit for his picture! 'Twas easy to give him a ginger-snap pig. I hoped to see him some day not as romantically clad or subclad, in some Christian school, and possibly pulpit. *Quien sabe?*

A hideous, homely dame was at the fountain, filling her pitcher.



A girl of fifteen was on one side; one of five on the other. I made friends with the mother by the gift of one of my pigs to the little one. I asked her about her husband. She had none. Was he dead? "No." Where was the father of these children? "In Monterey." How many children had she? "These two only." The same father? "Yes." That conversation revealed the Samaritan-woman condition of this people. Very few are married. It is said the fees of the priest are so high as to prevent it. He asks eight dollars a wedding. But as all marriages now are civil, and the price the State asks is not high, I think the charge against the clergy does not explain the real cause of this social degeneracy. It is in the blood. There was no seeming sense of shame in her answers, no modesty, or lack of it. Far prettier and more affecting was the answer of an old beggar-woman, later in the day, to my inquiry, Where is your husband? She pointed to the ground, and said nothing.

It was a strange feeling that I had as I sat thus by the well, and talked with this poor outcast woman, who is without any clear, convincing conscience, and has no hope except that Christ comes and talks with her and such as her through His ministers and Church. "Lift up your eyes," you can hear Him say, "and behold the field; for it is white already to harvest. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into His harvest."

This hacienda follows us for ten miles, skirting the mountains on the lower or eastern side, and looking rich exceedingly in orchards and fields. The road runs on the higher levels, burned to ashes with six months' rainlessness, but still growing the mesquite in large numbers, which give a pretty wild-wood, rural character to the road, as it winds in and out among the light-green feathery branches.

The mountains come nearer the road on the west, mountains full of silver, the mozo of the coach says; for I have climbed out of my lonely centre to the seat with the driver. The range is called the Sierra Prieto. At its base is a horrible cluster of huts, only four or five feet high in the ridge-pole, covered with thatch, and barbarous almost to the Ottawa condition of debasement. It swings forth the stately title of Mortevillos, which, if it meant "Deadville,"

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Sucede lo  
mismo en  
otras partes.

Si en las  
inscripciones me  
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would not be far from the truth. It is a painful answer to all this silver range, this terrible, debased humanity. It is a greater answer to the Church that professes to guide them. A cross over one or two of the huts shows the faith without works which so characterizes the most of the Roman Church in this and every country.

The valley, whose southern edge this ragged rancho fringes, is broad and handsome, but not as seemingly well cultivated as the one preceding; perhaps because the one owner there keeps up a more perfect establishment than the many owners here.

In its centre you see the white towers and domes of a church, and, driving to it, find yourself in the large and fresh-looking village of Montezuma.

In my college days I had heard much of reveling in the halls of the Montezumas. It was the time of the Mexican war, and that was a favorite phrase of that conflict. I had had no good opportunity to indulge in such reveling heretofore. There is only one place where it could even pretend to be in the halls of that emperor—Chapultepec, and that was built long after he died; and Lerdo gave no breakfast there while I was in Mexico, and had he done so I should not have been invited. But here comes, unexpectedly, the real article; for breakfast is to be served up here, and we shall indeed revel in the halls of Montezuma.

Do you wish to know in what the reveling consists? Enter the large square court-yard of the Meson del Refugio (House of Refuge). A door on one of its sides opens into a clean, cool room; the white cover and clean plates look attractive. Our bread is hot tortillas. Truly Montezumaish, for he never saw French rolls, and, curiously enough, this is the first place I have not seen those rolls in all the journey, and only once before in all the country. The cakes are light, warm, and edible, more so than corn-meal fritters in the States.

Next comes rice, also cooked better than in the States, cooked dry, and each kernel by itself, not mashed and moist. It is also spiced with cloves—the first time I ever saw it, and I hope not the last, for it greatly improved the dish.



The meat fell back from this high standard. Steaks, fried in fat and chilli; goats' flesh, in a gravy of chilli, a hot, thick, tomato-colored gravy. To neither of these did I incline. But the frejollis, or beans, were good, and the tea and coffee excellent. So I reveled, quite Spartan-like, in the hall of Montezuma, and all for four reals, or fifty cents. As I took my seat at the table, beggars came and took their stand at the door-way, first an old man, then an old woman. Very decrepit, but very obstinate, was the old lady. She was going to march immediately on the enemy's works; but the old man held her in. So she squatted at the door-way and talked with him, waiting my outgoing. She grabbed my legs with her skinny clutch. I surrendered, and gave her a cuartillia, on condition she would give the old man half. This she promised, but I fear failed to keep her word, for he came to me afterward and said she had not given him his share. He was not the first victim of misplaced confidence, especially of man in woman. How can beggars be charitable? Perhaps, however, she gave him his share, and he pretended she had not in order to get a duplicate from me. Who can trust who here?

There is a fine stone monument in the plaza to Montezuma, and some of the buildings are pretty. The fields about are green, and in the cool of the day there are a good many worse places than Montezuma.

I leave these beggars, who look old enough to be the very contemporaries of the unfortunate ruler, and get inside the coach, having all the three seats to myself. I stretch upon them all, and sleep as soundly as if on a bed, more soundly than on my too fully occupied bed last night at the San Luis Hotel. As I rolled softly along, I felt the superiority of this sort of travel over the tossing and sea-sick steamer, and was adapting Saxe to the occasion:

"Bless us, this is pleasant,  
Riding in the stage."

Even when the dust and heat grew dense and potent, I found relief in that sublime line of Cowper, and changed this cloud into that grand vision:

"For He whose cars the winds are, and the clouds  
The dust that waits upon His sultry march  
When sin hath moved Him, and His wrath is hot,  
Shall visit earth with mercy; shall descend  
Propitious in His chariot paved with love;  
And what His storms have blasted and defaced  
For man's revolt, shall with a smile repair."

May He descend in mercy soon upon this long-suffering people.

The same parks and hills and divides accompany us into the next cultured hollow, which incloses the flourishing town of Venada. Thence our last posta brings us to Chalcos, a mineral town of fifteen thousand inhabitants. Into its large square, centred with a fountain, we gallop, before five o'clock, and finish our first day at sea. How glad the sea-sick people on the Atlantic would be if they could get off, and get into unshaking beds every twelve hours. This gives even the stage a vast superiority over the ship. Twelve hours' run, twelve rest, carry us without great weariness forward to our port.

This is a flourishing silver mining town of small size. Yet a million of dollars a year are taken out of its mines. Four haciendas reduce the ore. The mines are owned by French gentlemen. Several pretty plazas adorn the town, which romantically lies on the slope of not steep hills.

As I was walking through the street just at dark with a native who was showing me the place, I saw the people kneeling, and heard the bell toll. Asking my man the meaning, "El Viatico," he replies—the Holy Wafer borne to the dying bed. The priest came, with a black umbrella over his head; boys with candles on either side, and a few persons walking with him. He held the wafer in his hand. Down went my guide upon his knees. After he had passed, I asked who it was that was dying. "Un grand hombre" (an old man). "Sick long?" "Only fifteen days." "Of what?" "Fever." So a poor soul is going to his account to-night in this town. How many elsewhere the wide earth over! Our first day may be our last. "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh." This was the first sight of



the procession of the Holy Wafer I had seen. It would not have been allowed in the larger cities. Nor could I have witnessed it without kneeling myself a few years ago, except at the cost of my life.

The hot day has grown cool, a fresh breeze blows from the hills, and a good rest will prepare for our second day at sea.

## VIII.

## MID-OCEAN.

The "Rolling Forties."—Ceral Hard-tack.—Not so Hard.—Mexican Birds.—Smoking-girls.—Laguna Seca.—La Punta.—First Breakfast in an Adobe.—Hacienda of Precita.—The Spanish Bayonet.—Mattejuala.—Birnam Wood marching on Dunsinane.—The first and last Mosquito of Mexico.—Yankee Singing.—Worse threatened.

THE point in a journey where you strike the dead neutral centre between the coming and the going is almost always one of intense disagreeableness. Such the ocean wanderer finds the "rolling forties," in "the dead waste and middle of" that tiresome ferriage. I am in the like condition now. I doubt if many would take this trip could they see this room before they start; nor would many cross the ocean if they were treated to a foretaste of that ridge where the waves roll east and west, and the spirits sink like lead in the mighty waters.

The room is in the Casa Diligencias Generales, in the town of Ceral, which contains three thousand human inhabitants. Of course, being the stage-house, it is the best in the place; and it is the best room in the house; since I, being the only passenger, have my pick. Look at it. First look at that muddy water, a tumbler of which that dirty boy has just brought in. A Mississippi boatman could not taste it. It is worse than the Thames after Hood's "Bridge of Sighs" had spanned it.

"Drink of it, lave in it then, if you can."

It stands on a dressing-table that saw paint in spots a century ago, and has hardly seen soap since. Adjoining it is a like white-and-gray wash-stand, its legs inclining inward from the decrepitude of