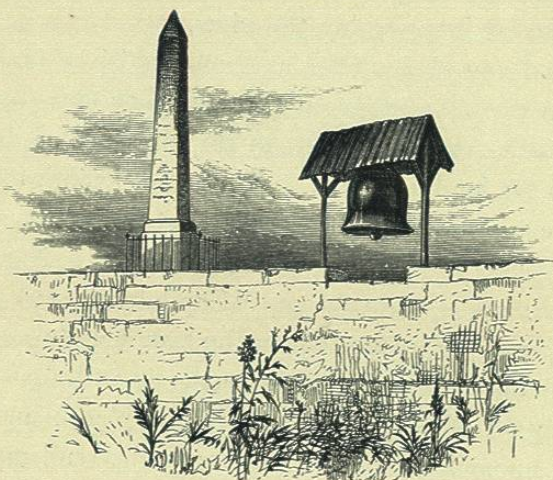


tualities of the view. Of course everybody was in a hurry and bustle to get ashore; but had it not been for the firmness of Colonel Boyer, we should have been again put into quarantine, the Spanish steamer having reported that we had arrived at the Havana with cholera on board. Fortunately for us, the authorities here listened to reason, and just as night began to fall, we found ourselves standing on the mole of Vera Cruz. In Mexico at last!



ALARM BELL, MORO FORT, HAVANA.



PEAK OF ORIZABA.

## CHAPTER II.

## A RIDE UP THE COUNTRY.

VERA CRUZ was a very Babel. Zouaves, Turcos, Chasseurs d'Afrique, and Nubians—belonging to the Egyptian Legion—were bustling about, and hurrying their way through the crowds of Mexicans, Indians, cargadores,\* arrieros,† and impatient travellers, who, on the eve of the departure of the mail-steamer, invariably block up the *zaguan*, or portal, of the Custom-house; for the homeward-bound passengers had been impatiently awaiting

\* Cargadores,—porters.      † Arrieros,—mule-cart drivers.



our arrival in the 'Impératrice,' and were more than anxious to turn their backs on the town, and the chances of yellow-fever. Neither, I think, were the invalids and time-expired men sorry to be off. They bore all the unmistakeable signs of having made many a long and weary march in Mexico, and their travel-stained uniforms made the white dresses of the Egyptian soldiers stand out in striking contrast. These same Egyptians have garrisoned Vera Cruz for about four years, being lent to the French Government by the Viceroy of Egypt. They are exceedingly clean and smart soldiers, nor in one instance have they failed to behave admirably before the enemy; in fact, they are more dreaded in the "Tierra Caliente" by the guerilla bands than most of the other troops who have had the bad fortune to be garrisoned in this unhealthy climate. Perhaps offenders have a wholesome recollection of their vengeance, when they sallied forth from Tejeria to kill every man in a village hard by, where one of their comrades had been assassinated; and I imagine it will be many a long day before the freebooters will venture to dwell again in this place of ill omen.

The hotels were all hurry and confusion; each bedroom held some three or four travellers, and baggage was mixed up in the most despairing manner. Thanks, however, to the hospitality of

Mr. Coulombeix, the Intendant Militaire, who gave us rooms in his house, we escaped all these miseries. On the whole, though, Vera Cruz was decidedly too hot and too overcrowded to remain in longer than possible, so the second morning saw our party off by the "Imperial Mexican Railroad" to Paso del Macho, a distance of some fifty miles, and the terminus at present of the line, which, when completed, is to run to the capital.

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Paso del Macho is like all temporary towns that spring up along new lines of rail, flourish awhile, and then collapse as the line is opened further. Everything about the place has a temporary air. The hotels—and they are many in number, and all bad,—being built of a combination of planking and sheet-iron, are dismal indeed to gaze upon, and productive of misgivings as to the good cheer to be found within their boards. Enter, and immediately your forebodings will be realized—for you will find the interior dirty, and the food bad; the heat terrific, and a very plague of Egypt with regard to flies. Fortunately, we found an escort of Chasseurs d'Afrique waiting the arrival of Colonel Boyer, so were not delayed very long; and what with arranging one's kit and saddle, etc., got through the day pretty fairly.

In the evening we strolled down to one of the *fondas*\* in the town to see the Indian population

\* A 'fonda' is a sort of eating and drinking booth, wayside tavern.



dance the "Jarabe," and were much amused. It is a dance peculiar to the Terre Chaude, far from ungraceful, and resembling a slow sort of Sir Roger de Coverley; however, the heat was so stifling, and the place so crowded, that we did not remain many minutes.

Don't you imagine, though, that we slept peacefully in the Hôtel Universel. The flies never sleep at Paso del Macho, and, as soon as night falls, voracious mosquitoes sally forth by myriads.

As far as I can remember, we mustered the next morning in rather bad tempers and not very fresh for the long march we had before us, some ten leagues to Cordova. How glad we were to find ourselves at the top of the Chiquihuite Pass, and on the borders of the "Tierra Templada," looking down on the steaming plains and tropical vegetation of the "Terre Chaude," and the swift torrent that dashes along the bed of the ravine, spanned by an old Spanish bridge!

Although the change of climate was visibly felt, still our march was hot and dusty, the road bad and very difficult, even for our lightly-laden *chariots de parc*, it being very nearly four P.M. before we arrived at Cordova, a dull little town springing up from amidst a perfect wilderness of tropical vegetation, and towered over in the distance by the lofty snow-clad peak of Orizaba.

I forgot to tell you that along the road of that hot day's march, we had passed, every now and then, the works of the railroad company. Certainly, when completed, this will be one of the most marvellous lines of the century. You cannot imagine the difficulties of country to contend with; even at the very outset the pass of Chiquihuite appears impracticable, and there are far worse obstacles to be surmounted before arriving in the valley of Mexico; but the line has been most carefully traced out, and with money—which, unfortunately, appears too scarce at present—there can be no doubt that railroad communication between Vera Cruz and the capital will eventually be an accomplished fact; and that it will pay in the end there can be hardly a question to any one who has seen the heavily laden convoys of merchandise that labour along, drawn with difficulty by ten, fifteen, even twenty or more mules up the infamous road from the principal seaport in the country to Mexico.

From Cordova,—which quiet little town appears to have been shaken almost out of shape by an undue share of earthquakes, still travelling under the shadow of the snow peak of Orizaba, which certainly comes up to, if it does not even exceed, one's preconceived notions of its imposing grandeur,—we made a dusty journey the next day as far as Orizaba. This was one of those tantalizing marches



during which you catch continual glimpses of the town you wish to reach, imagine your day's work nearly at an end, and still mile after mile hardly seem to bring you much nearer. Fortunately all marches come to an end, and late in the afternoon we rode up the long main street of Orizaba, and set to work to find our lodgings for the night. The town has nothing particular about it, and leaves no great impression on one; nevertheless, the climate is perfection, and after the oppressive, hot, unwholesome atmosphere of Vera Cruz, the change is absolutely a luxury.

On the 18th we made a march of eight leagues, which brought us to Aculcingo, a lonely scattered village, situated at the foot of the Cumbres, the formidable mountain barrier closing in the valley of Orizaba, and held in abhorrence by all arrieros, diligence-drivers, and travellers in general. It is, notwithstanding, an obstacle to be surmounted in order to reach Mexico, that is, until the railway company completes its line through the Maltrata Pass, lying at the foot of the Black Mountain and the Peak, and involving a circuit increasing the distance at least twofold.

The next morning, at five o'clock, we started to ride slowly up the winding road,\* and at last reaching the summit of the Grandes Cumbres, halted

\* It has some thirty turns, if I remember rightly.

to give our baggage and rear-guard the time to rejoin us. The morning air was bitterly cold, and we were obliged to walk about to keep ourselves warm, but the view was magnificent. The fine valley of Orizaba lay beneath us, and the morning sun dyed the snow-clad peak with the most brilliant hues, whilst immediately below our feet were the waggons toiling up the steep ascent, and the diligence, on its road to Mexico, crawling along with difficulty, although drawn by an incredible number of mules. When our rear-guard had arrived and rested a short time, we descended into a wild, highland-looking valley, thickly wooded, where numerous wooden crosses testify to the many advantages the spot offers to guerilla bands,\* who invariably make their head-quarters not far from the high-road traversing the pass. Crossing a small stone bridge, known as the Puente Colorado, spanning the torrent in the bottom, we again mounted a repetition of the winding road, and another formidable ascent, although this time it was fortunately not quite so steep or so long as the previous one. This brought us to the summit of the Second Cumbres, on the broad plateau beyond. Once fairly on the level, we soon pushed on to breakfast at the Cañada, a prettily situated little village, passing along the road-

\* Wherever a traveller has been murdered, the Mexicans always erect a wooden cross by the roadside.



side more hares than I ever before have seen in a day. From thence we kept on as far as the town of Palmas, the road being worse than ever, and deep in fine sand; however, at the end of our thirteen leagues we found a clean, comfortable hotel, and after our late experience in this line, that alone made ample amends to us for the heat and toil of the day.

The 20th, *en route* again, and eight leagues to Acatzingo, a small town with a very large plaza, a very small fountain, and an inordinate number of churches, all of them bearing evident signs of having suffered severely from the earthquake which occurred a few months before our arrival. The 21st, we did nine leagues to Amozoc, and on the 22nd passed through the fine city of Puebla, halting a short distance beyond it at the Molino del Puente de Méjico, but still passing several hours in the city, where there are many evident traces to be seen of the hard fighting that took place during the siege directed by the Marshal Forey.

Puebla was originally one of the richest cities belonging to the old clerical party, and abounds in churches and convents—many of them now turned into barracks and military storehouses,—indeed, the first view of its numerous domes and towers remind you at once of some Eastern city; and if you could

only for a moment suppress the surrounding hills and the distant glimpse of the snow mountains, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, half shrouded in mist, it would resemble strikingly another large city, many, many thousands of miles away, that also has undergone its fair share of sieges, Lucknow.

On the right as you enter by the Garita\* de Vera Cruz, the fort of Guadalupe (at the unsuccessful assault of which, during the attack on the city by General Lorencez, the French lost heavily), and the fort of Loretto, constructed on two eminences, appear completely to command the place; nevertheless, the attack at the siege under Marshal Forey was commenced from the opposite side, beyond the range of these forts, and directed against the outlying churches and buildings, each in itself representing a separate work, situated to the right and left of the road to Mexico. And this proved successful, for the Guadalupe and the Loretto were eventually taken possession of without firing a shot.

The 22nd was a Sunday, and the streets were crowded with people, Mexicans in their best sombreros, Austrians, Huns, Indians bringing fruit into market, and pretty, graceful little women in black mantillas hurrying to Mass—for Puebla, and I think with justice, makes a boast of the beauty of

\* Garita,—gate of entry, post of the municipal custom-houses.

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(!)



its fair sex,—rendering it quite a difficulty to reach the plaza.

Leaving our horses at one corner of the square, we walked along under the arcades and entered the great cathedral, forming an entire side of the large plaza, and one of the most imposing religious edifices in the country. The decorations are magnificent, but in good taste, nor does effect appear to be strained for overmuch; indeed, I do not think that the reverential feelings of the “*religio loci*” can fail to arise in one’s mind, as one thinks of the brave old warriors who fought with cross and sword to conquer Mexico for old Spain, and left such lasting memorials of their perseverance and faith.

After stopping for a few moments to look at the Penitencier and Santa Inés, two large buildings just before arriving at the Garita de Méjico, almost entirely destroyed by the French batteries, we rode up the Cerro San Juan, a hill at a short distance from the gates, commanding a fine view of the city, and where Marshal Forey established his headquarters during the siege. By this time it was getting late, and cantering on we arrived at the Mill with good appetites for a rather late breakfast.

The march of the 23rd brought us to San Martin, and the 24th to Rio Frio, the highest point be-

tween Vera Cruz and Mexico, where we were glad to dine in a small room warmed by a huge pine log-fire, for the cold was intense, and there was even a strong frost during the night.

During these last two days we had been gradually circling round the great snow-mountains, the Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl,\* towering over the Valley of Mexico. I confess myself incapable of picturing them to you, and I am sure you will fail to realize the impression their wild and savage grandeur made upon us all. They rise suddenly out of a low mountain-range, their summits covered with eternal snow, and their feet clothed with dense masses of dark-green pine forest. At a distance their slopes appear even and regular, but on nearing the Ixtaccihuatl, and looking from “Puente Tescmelucan,” near Rio Frio, the dark black ravines, rending the sides of the mountain, show out in deep shadow against the contrast of the pure, shining snow.

Seen from the Valley of Mexico, this last mountain bears, with the assistance of a little imagination, a curious resemblance to the form of a female figure in repose; indeed, by the Aztecs the “white woman” was regarded as the mysterious deity who presided over the destinies of Mexico. I wonder whether in the old days she ever pictured to herself an Austrian Emperor and a French

\* Ixtaccihuatl means ‘white woman.’



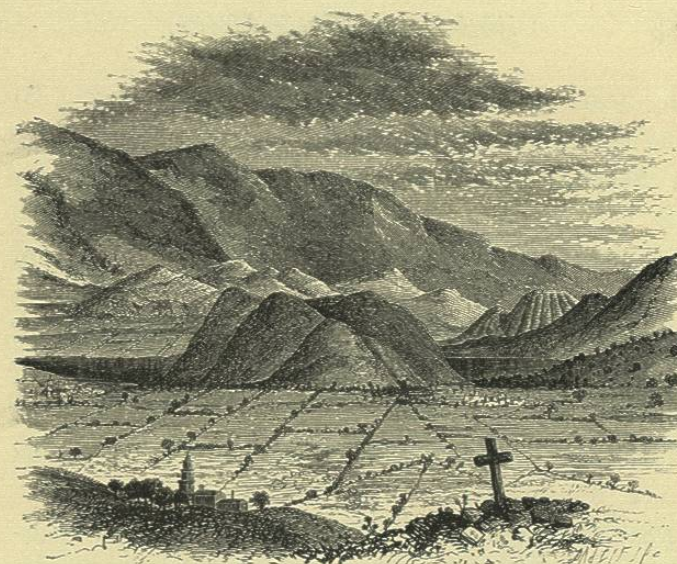
army governing the Valley of the Lakes. I fancy not.

27 de  
abril  
de 1866.  
From Rio Frio we descended into the Valley of Mexico, and the third day, the 27th of April, following the road between the two great lakes of Chalco and Tezcoco, we arrived at the Garita of the capital.



AUSTRIAN HULAN.

MEXICAN LEVY.



VALLEY OF MEXICO: DESCENT FROM RIO FRIO.

## CHAPTER III.

## MEXICO.

THE Calzada is the name of the long straight road passing between Chalco and Tezcoco; it is constructed upon a large embankment, in existence as far back as the days of the Spanish invasion, and although the face of the scene has been vastly changed by the receding of the waters, nevertheless when you first discover Mexico, stretching, one might almost fancy, far along the surface of the lakes, possibly you may be on the very spot from which Ferdinand Cortés gazed with an exult-