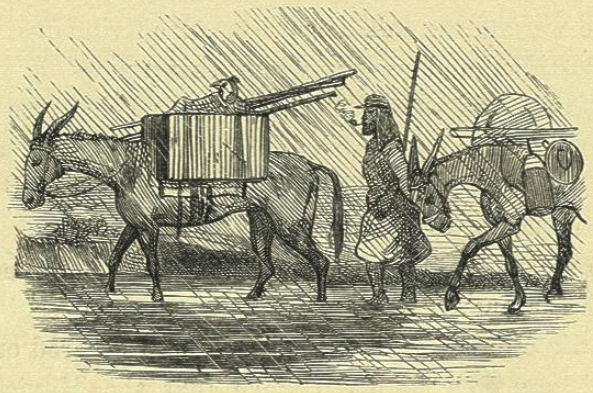
brave men, but like the Levite in the parable, "passed by on the other side," and judged it prudent to leave them alone.

I do not think that this affair encouraged the Liberal party very much. You must remember they lost very heavily; all their men in the hacienda had been killed, and the success was virtually a barren one, as far as any ulterior advantage resulting to them from it.

Still, things were in this wise, no one knew exactly what the next move would be; the probable evacuation of Mexico by the French was in everybody's mouth, and reports were circulated that Austria would certainly refuse to lend more troops to Maximilian, her disputes with Prussia becoming every day more and more serious.



DURING THE RAIN.

UNDER THE PORTALS OF A HACIENDA.

CHAPTER VI.

NORTHWARD HO!

It was a thick, misty morning on the 21st, when we again started off with our horses' heads northwards, but the rain luckily did not come down until after we had all got under shelter at Soledad. We had equally good fortune on the next day, and were in our billets, in the charming little town of San Juan del Rio, just in time to escape the usual afternoon's storm. Really, we were marching away as rapidly as possible from the wet season, which appears to begin in the Valley of Mexico during

May, and then gradually works its way towards the north, and from here to Queretaro the downfalls of rain seldom commenced before three or four o'clock in the afternoon, by which time our day's march, for we started very early, usually at five in the morning, was finished.

De Colbert and I were certainly fortunate in St. Juan, for we were lodged with the most obliging people possible, and I verily believe the house would have been placed at our disposal, and the owner and his family have retired altogether had we demanded it; but all we asked for out of the way was permission to borrow some books from the drawing-room, which was neatly and well furnished, as indeed were all the apartments. I wish I could recollect the name of the work I took; it was some very ancient history of travels in Mexico, written towards the end of the last century by some enterprising Anglo-Saxon, and I declare I got so interested in the author's quaint old style, that I was half an hour behindhand in taking my tub, and consequently late for dinner, bringing down upon my head the anathemas of the *chef de popote*,—an individual by no means to be trifled with, as regarded his meals or his liquor. During dinner, of course we became reconciled; and later on in the evening, strolling down the broad, clean, principal street of the little town, under the avenue shadowing the

side-walks, I remember we came to a wise decision over our cigars, "that really, after all, Mexico was not so very bad a country, were it not for the perversity and obstinacy of the people who inhabit it."

But it was getting late, and we were to be up early the next morning. There was not sufficient time to discuss the why or the wherefore of this perversity too closely; so, attributing the ill-fortune and faults of the Mexican race to the possibility of their having been born under the influences of an evil star, we "turned in" and slept peacefully, as becomes men who have taken strong exercise and dined.

Before the sun was up, we were across the massive old stone bridge spanning the fast-running mountain-stream from which San Juan takes its name, and a long, dusty march brought us to a wretched hacienda in the last stage of decay, Colorado. There was not a room in the building where an Irishman would have put his pig, with the exception of the chapel, so there we were compelled to make our quarters, dine, and sleep,—all of us, French and Belgians, converting the sacristy into a dressing-room for ablutionary purposes.

You may imagine we were not sorry on the 25th when we mounted the last range of hills separating us from Queretaro, and arriving on the ridge were

rejoiced by the sight of the lovely valley beneath; for we had been travelling, since turning our backs on San Juan del Rio, over such ground as fortunately you only meet with in Mexico. It consists of a barren white soil, known by the name of *tepetate*, producing nothing but a ragged, dried-up description of moss, whilst here and there, through the numerous rents and fissures, crops up a stunted, misshapen yucca or the eternal maguey; for one can walk but a few yards without coming across one or other of these two plants anywhere in the land.

With the additions of a hot sun and dusty roads, such scenery, I can assure you, produces a most depressing effect, and it was a positive relief to our eyes to gaze down upon the fertile basin below us.

Shut in by mountains on every side, and with a temperature warmer than the Tierra Templada, though by no means so oppressively hot as that of the Tierra Caliente, the valley of Queretaro produces almost every fruit that grows in the country. The city itself, rejoicing, like Puebla, in many domes and steeples, is almost hidden from sight by the dense groves of trees that meet the view in every direction, a magnificent aqueduct connecting it with the hillside on the right—a work which must have originally cost an immense expenditure of time, money, and labour, but still leaves an impression upon you that it must be a piece of fairy architecture, so lofty are the arches, so apparently light, and withal so eminently graceful.

Indeed, it was a scene to gladden us, wearied by those everlasting aloes and yuccas. I feel sure, in my own mind, that it will be a very long time before I shall ever be able to contemplate calmly either of these two last productions of the vegetable kingdom, or any species of cactus, without, at the least, suffering from a partial loss of temper.

Here were formerly the richest convents in Mexico, but, although one or two of them still exist, the greater number have either been closed or have lost the greater part of their property by confiscation; still, these and the churches are the finest buildings in the city, as is the case in nearly all Mexico. The plaza covers a large extent of ground, but, being entirely paved, has a heavy air, and the streets are laid down with those rough, slippery, impossible, round sort of paving-stones, that you find not unfrequently in many Continental towns, and are not likely to forget in a hurry, if you have ever been unfortunate enough to travel over them in a lumbering old diligence, as has been my fate several times. Here we found the 3rd Zouaves, commanded by Colonel Bochet, a connection of De Colbert's, and to whom I had also brought letters of introduction. He received us most hospitably, and, during the two days' halt we

made, I feel a conviction that we sat down to two of the best dinners, and spent two of the most agreeable evenings, I can recall in Mexico.

There are many pleasant rides to tempt you beyond the city; one especially, which we took, down the valley of the Cañada, was charming. Just beyond the suburbs, passing the country house and lovely gardens belonging to the Rubio family, —a little further on, a block of buildings, loop-holed, and flanked by towers, manifestly a fort, attracts attention. Yet this is only the *fabrique* of the Rubios, where the finest zarapes and rebozos are woven; but in Mexico the Chinacos—the worst outsiders of the Liberal party—are apt to pounce upon any manufactory of this description, levy a blackmail in the name of Liberty,—poor Liberty! her name is taken in vain here almost as much as in the Old World!—and depart as quickly as possible, possibly leaving two or three poor devils, who may have offended them by word or deed, hanging on the trees, *pour encourager les autres.*

So you see the proprietors of similar establishments are compelled to become, to a certain extent, soldiers; and it will not astonish you to learn that the Rubios have the permission of the Government to keep up a certain force of men for the protection of their property, and that sentries mount nightly upon their walls.

Passing the *fabrique*, and the small town of neatly-built and well-kept houses occupied by the Indian factory hands, and which do infinite credit to the Rubios, we follow a long, narrow valley, overgrown with fruit trees, and traversed by a clear running stream, looking very much as if it ought to hold trout,—but unfortunately it does not,—and eventually come to a halt at the baths of the Cañada. These baths are hewn out of the solid rock, and are about twelve feet square by five feet deep. There are about half-a-dozen of them, and the water, which comes from a spring close by, is naturally tepid, just warm enough to be refreshing for a dip after our ride out. Ten minutes' splashing about, a quarter of an hour to dress, and we do the couple of leagues back to Queretaro, at a sharp canter, where we arrive decidedly refreshed, and with such good appetites that we certainly shall hurry our dressing for dinner, when we hear that the *potage* is on the table.

On the morning of the 27th, the convoy—heavier and more cumbersome than ever, for it got an additional lot of carts and a few more *isolés** by halting at Queretaro—started for Montenegro, De Colbert and I remaining behind to breakfast with an old friend of his, Couturier, the Capitaine-Adju-

* 'Isolés' is the French military term for soldiers detached from their corps.

dant-Major of the Zouaves. In the afternoon we rode out to join our convoy, and did not reach Montenegro until dark,—the road being very steep and rough, for more than half the distance encumbered with large rolling stones, the remains of an old Spanish causeway that apparently never has been and never will be repaired, and hence it was almost impossible for us to move out of a walk or an occasional trot. The next day's march lay through a fine, well-cultivated valley, and on our left we passed a very large lake, covered with waterfowl, and the most tempting place possible to launch a punt in. I was astonished at this season to see as many duck as I did, but, passing again in November, there were literally myriads. In fact, nearly every piece of water during the winter is black with geese and widgeon, teal, duck, and divers, and grebe of different sorts. Either on the great lakes in the valley of Mexico, or on any of the large pieces of water which are common throughout the country, a punt might be worked with the greatest ease. There are, however, two drawbacks, for, in the first place, wildfowl on the lakes of the valley are private property, and it might be difficult to obtain a permit,—this, I fancy, though, might be overcome by feeing the men who farm the lakes; and, in the second place, the roads, and the uncertainty of getting any means of transport, would

be almost an insurmountable hindrance to changing one's ground from time to time, and duck and widgeon are pretty much the same all the world over: they soon find out when a heavy punt gun is in their neighbourhood.

La Noria, our point on the 20th, is one of the most flourishing haciendas we have yet come across. The haciendado was communicative, and spoke French very fairly. In the afternoon he took us through all the buildings and granaries, giving us at the same time ample information as to the management of these colossal farms. The principal homestead—the hacienda—is built all over the country pretty much upon the same plan. It is a large quadrangular stone building, frequently loopholed and fortified, with all the windows upon the outside strongly barred; you enter by a large arched gateway, and under the portal, to the right, generally find the "tienda y fonda," appertaining to the owner, where the Indians on the property are obliged to purchase everything of which they stand in need; in fact, they are encouraged to run up long scores, or squander their hardly-earned wages in drink, in order that the little money they have got may again find its way back into the pockets of their masters. To the left is the sanctum of the haciendado, where he transacts all business, and

* Tienda y fonda,—grocery, wine store, eating-house.

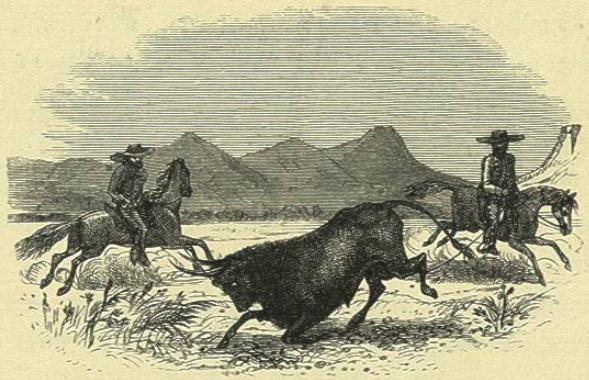
issues orders to his subordinates, seldom interfering himself with any out-of-door arrangements, quitting his easy chair, or extinguishing the eternal papelito, except to take his meals. Beyond the portal you enter into a large courtyard, comprising all the superior accommodation of the hacienda; in the centre is probably a fountain shaded by trees, and under the verandahs you generally find flowers in profusion, and dozens of cages containing the bright-plumaged birds that don't sing, and the more homely-looking mocking-bird, who keeps everything on the *qui vive*, imitating even the cats or the French clairons. Passing through this courtyard you enter another, and here is stabling for all the more valuable stock, the stallions, riding-horses, driving-mules, etc. etc., for it would be dangerous to leave them outside to the tender mercies of MM. les Chinacos. Adjoining this, and forming part of the same block, is always a chapel. Around the hacienda, but at a respectful distance,—lest they should be captured, and serve as a shelter to any enemy,—lie the large farm-buildings, granaries, threshing-floors, store houses, and large corrals, or enclosures, for cattle and horses.

This is the main farm, and is generally situated as nearly as possible in the centre of the tracts belonging to the hacienda, which has probably ten, fifteen, or even more, square leagues of land appertaining to it. There are the vast runs of pasture land, where herds of horses and cattle roam about half-wild; these are under the care of the vaqueros, who are responsible for their not straying, and are charged with their branding, lassoing, etc. The whole extent of the property is divided into ranchos, or small farms, under the direction of rancheros, who either receive a salary from the head proprietor, or a percentage on the earnings of the rancho. The field work is done by the peones, who, although not exactly slaves, are very nearly so in everything but the name. They are born, live, work, and die on the estate, never being their own masters, for they are invariably indebted to the tienda, and obliged continually to be working out their debt, which they do not often succeed in doing. The home work is done by the mozos, who perhaps have a trifle the best of it; the servants of the hacienda itself, who wait on the family or the haciendado, being termed the criados. To sum up, the whole business reminds one forcibly of the system of caste among the servants in India.

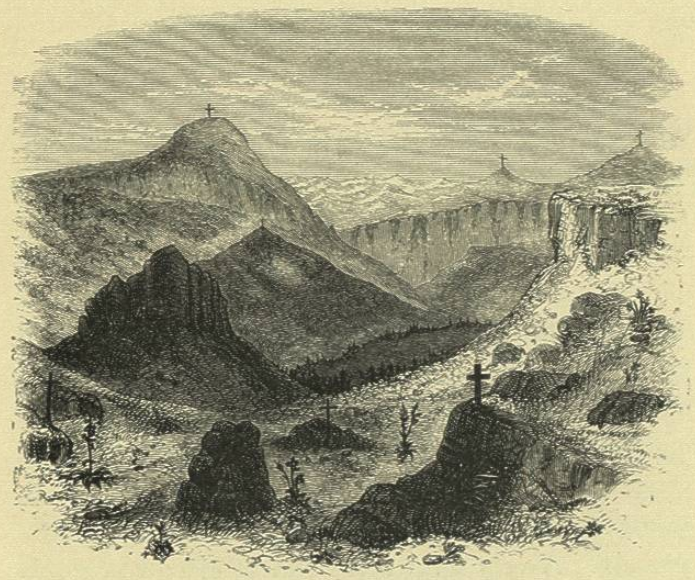
As long as the proprietor of the hacienda manages his property himself, all goes pretty fairly, but this is seldom the case; he generally lives either in Mexico or one of the large cities, and spends every peso he can get hold of,—leaving his affairs to a majordomo, who, of course, makes his own

purse and fills his own pockets by every means at his disposal.

Then there is wailing and lamentation amongst the rancheros, the peones, and the mozos, for the hour is come when they, perforce, go to the wall!



VAQUEROS.



PASS OF SANTA MARIA DEL RIO.

CHAPTER VII.

TO ST. LUIS POTOSI AND VENADO.

THE march of the 30th brought us to the small town of St. Luis de la Paz, garrisoned by Zouaves; and here we were again compelled to halt, the bad roads and overladen carts telling heavily on the mules.

Looking back to my diary, I find the entry for these two days is as follows:—"St. Luis de la Paz. Beastly hole; bad quarters; bad food." It is never worth while to dwell long over disagreeable recollections; so, if you please, we will pass on to the hacienda of La Sousada, where we were well lodged on the 1st of June, and heard some news.