

leaves. In front, at a distance of ten or fifteen feet, was a large wooden cross. The floor was of bare earth, but swept clean and strewed with pine-leaves; the sides were trimmed with branches and festoons of flowers, and the altar was ornamented with figures of the Virgin and saints, and wreaths of flowers. It was a long time since the people had had the privilege of hearing mass, and the whole population, Spaniards, Mestizoes, and Indians, answered the unexpected but welcome call of the matin bell. The floor was covered with kneeling women having white shawls over their heads, and behind, leaning against the rude pillars, were the men; and their earnestness and humility, the earthen floor and the thatched roof, were more imposing than the pomp of worship in the rich cathedrals of Europe or under the dome of St. Peter's.

After breakfast we inquired for a barber, and were referred to the collector of the port, who, we were told, was the best hair-cutter in the place. His house was no bigger than his neighbours', but inside hung a military saddle, with holsters and pistols, and a huge sword, the accoutrements of the collector when he sallied out at the head of his deputy to strike terror into the heart of a smuggler. Unfortunately, the honest democrat was not at home; but the deputy offered his own services. Mr. C. and I submitted; but the padre, who wanted his crown shaved, according to the rules of his order, determined to wait the return of the collector.

I next called upon the commandant with my passport. His house was on the opposite side of the square. A soldier about fourteen years old, with a bell-crowned straw hat falling over his eyes like an extinguisher upon a candle, was standing at the door as sentinel. The troops, consisting of about thirty men and boys, were drawn up in front, and a sergeant was smoking a cigar and drilling them. The uniform purported to be a white straw hat, cotton trousers, and shirt outside, musket, and cartridge-box. In one particular, uniformity was strictly observed, viz. all were barefooted. The first process of calling off rank and file was omitted; and, as it happened, a long-legged fellow, six feet high, stood next to a boy twelve or thirteen years old. The custom-house officer was with the sergeant, advising him; and, after a manoeuvre and a consultation, the sergeant walked up to the line, and with the palm of his hand struck a soldier on that part of the body which, in my younger days, was considered by the schoolmaster the channel of knowledge into a boy's brain.

The commandant of this hopeful band was Don Juan Peñol, a gentleman by birth and education, who, with others of his family, had been banished by General Morazan, and sought refuge in the United States.

His predecessor, who was an officer of Morazan, had been just driven out by the Carrera party, and he was but twenty days in his place.

Three great parties at that time distracted Central America: that of Morazan, the former president of the Republic, in San Salvador, of Ferrera in Honduras, and of Carrera in Guatemala. Ferrera was a mulatto, and Carrera an Indian; and, though not fighting for any common purpose, they sympathized in opposition to Morazan. When Mr. Montgomery visited Guatemala, it was just thrown into a ferment by the rising of Carrera, who was then regarded as the head of a troop of banditti, a robber and assassin; his followers were called Cachurecos (meaning false coin), and Mr. Montgomery told me that against him an official passport would be no protection whatever. Now he was the head of the party that ruled Guatemala. Señor Peñol gave us a melancholy picture of the state of the country. A battle had just been fought near San Salvador, between General Morazan and Ferrera, in which the former was wounded, but Ferrera was routed, and his troops were cut to pieces, and he feared Morazan was about to march upon Guatemala. He could only give us a passport to Guatemala, which he said would not be respected by General Morazan.

We felt interested in the position of Señor Peñol; young, but with a face bearing the marks of care and anxiety, a consciousness of the miserable condition of the present, and fearful forebodings for the future. To our great regret, the intelligence we received induced our friend the padre to abandon, for the present, his intention of going to Guatemala. He had heard all the terrible stories of Morazan's persecution and proscription of the priests, and thought it dangerous to fall into his hands; and I have reason to believe it was the apprehension of this which ultimately drove him from the country.

Toward evening I strolled through the town. The population consists of about fifteen hundred Indians, negroes, mulattoes, Mestizoes, and mixed blood of every degree, with a few Spaniards. Very soon I was accosted by a man who called himself my countryman, a mulatto from Baltimore, and his name was Philip. He had been eight years in the country, and said that he had once thought of returning home as a servant by way of New Orleans, but he had left home in such a hurry that he forgot to bring with him his "Christian papers;" from which I inferred that he was what would be called in Maryland a runaway slave. He was a man of considerable standing, being fireman on board the steamboat at twenty-three dollars a month; besides which, he did odd jobs at carpentering, and was, in fact, the principal architect in Yzabal, having then on his hands a contract for 3500 dollars for building the new house of Messrs. Ampudia and Pulleiro. In other things,

I am sorry to say, Philip was not quite so respectable; and I can only hope that it was not his American education that led him into some irregularities in which he seemed to think there was no harm. He asked me to go to his house and see his wife, but on the way I learned from him that he was not married; and he said, what I hope is a slander upon the good people of Yzabal, that he only did as all the rest did. He owned the house in which he lived, and for which, with the ground, he had paid twelve dollars; and being a householder and an American, I tried to induce him to take advantage of the opportunity of the padre's visit, and set a good example by getting married; but he was obstinate, and said that he did not like to be trammelled, and that he might go elsewhere and see another girl whom he liked better.

While standing at his door, Mr. Catherwood passed on his way to visit Mr. Rush, the engineer of the steamboat, who had been ill on board. We found him in one of the huts of the town, in a hammock, with all his clothes on. He was a man of Herculean frame, six feet three or four inches high, and stout in proportion; but he lay helpless as a child. A single candle stuck upon the dirt floor gave a miserable light, and a group of men of different races and colour, from the white-faced Saxon to the Indian and African, stood round him: rude nurses for one used to the comforts of an English home. I recollected that Yzabal was noted as a sickly place; Mr. Montgomery, who published an interesting account of his visit to Guatemala in 1838, had told me that it was running the gauntlet for life even to pass through it, and I trembled for the poor Englishman. I remembered, too, what it is strange that I had before forgotten, that here Mr. Shannon, our chargé to Central America, died. Philip was with me, and knew where Mr. Shannon was buried, but in the dark he could not point out the spot. I intended to set out early in the morning; and afraid that, in the hurry of departure, I might neglect altogether the sacred duty of visiting, in this distant place, the grave of an American, I returned to the house and requested Señor Ampudia to accompany me. We crossed the square, passed through the suburbs, and in a few minutes were outside of the town. It was so dark that I could scarcely see my way. Crossing a deep gully on a plank, we reached a rising ground, open on the right, stretching away to the Golfo Dolce, and in front bounded by a gloomy forest. On the top was a rude fence of rough upright poles, enclosing the grave of some relative of Señor Ampudia; and by the side of this was the grave of Mr. Shannon. There was no stone or fence, or hardly any elevation to distinguish it from the soil around. It was a gloomy burial-place for a countryman, and I felt an involuntary

depression of spirit. A fatality had hung over our diplomatic appointment to Central America: Mr. Williams, Mr. Shannon, Mr. Dewitt, Mr. Leggett, all who had ever held it, were dead. I recollected an expression in a letter from a near relative of Mr. Dewitt: "May you be more fortunate than either of your predecessors has been." It was melancholy, that one who had died abroad in the service of his country was thus left on a wild mountain, without any stone to mark his grave. I returned to the house, directed a fence to be built around the grave of Mr. Shannon, and my friend the padre promised to plant at its head a cocoa-nut-tree.

At daylight the muleteers commenced loading for the passage of "the Mountain." At seven o'clock the whole caravan, consisting of nearly a hundred mules and twenty or thirty muleteers, was fairly under way. Our immediate party consisted of five mules; two for Mr. Catherwood and myself, one for Augustin, and two for luggage; besides which, we had four Indian carriers. If we had been consulted, perhaps at that time we should have scrupled to use men as beasts of burden; but Señor Ampudia had made all the arrangements for us. The Indians were naked, except a small piece of cotton cloth around the loins, and crossing in front between the legs. The loads were arranged so as to have on one side a flat surface. The Indians sat on the ground with their backs against the surface; passed a strap across the forehead, which supported the load; and, adjusting it on their shoulders, with the aid of a staff or the hand of a by-stander rose upon their feet. It seemed cruel; but, before much sympathy could be expended upon them, they were out of sight.

At eight o'clock Mr. C. and I mounted, each armed with a brace of pistols and a large hunting-knife, which we carried in a belt around the body; besides which, afraid to trust it in other hands, I had a mountain barometer slung over my shoulder. Augustin carried pistols and sword; our principal muleteer, who was mounted, carried a machete and a pair of murderous spurs, with rowels two inches long, on his naked heels; and two other muleteers accompanied us on foot, each carrying a gun.

A group of friendly by-standers gave us their adieus and good wishes; and, passing a few straggling houses which constituted the suburbs, we entered upon a marshy plain sprinkled with shrubs and small trees, and in a few minutes were in an unbroken forest. At every step the mules sank to their fetlocks in mud, and very soon we came to great puddles and mudholes, which reminded me of the breaking up of winter and the solitary horsepath in one of our primeval forests at home. As we advanced, the shade of the trees became

thicker, the holes larger and deeper, and roots, rising two or three feet above the ground, crossed the path in every direction. I gave the barometer to the muleteer, and had as much as I could do to keep myself on the saddle. All conversation was at an end, and we kept as close as we could to the track of the muleteer; when he descended into a mudhole, and crawled out, the entire legs of his mule blue with mud, we followed, and came out as blue as he.

The caravan of mules, which had started before us, was but a short distance ahead, and in a little while we heard ringing through the woods the loud shout of the muleteers and the sharp crack of the whip. We overtook them at the bank of a stream which broke rapidly over a stony bed. The whole caravan was moving up the bed of the stream; the water was darkened by the shade of the overhanging trees; the muleteers, without shirts, and with their large trowsers rolled up to the thighs and down from the waistband, were scattered among the mules; one was chasing a stray beast; a second darting at one whose load was slipping off; a third lifting up one that had fallen; another, with his foot braced against a mule's side, straining at the girth; all shouting, cursing, and lashing: the whole a mass of inextricable confusion, and presenting a scene almost terrific.

We held up to let them pass; and, crossing the stream, rode a short distance on a level road, but over fetlock deep in mud; and cutting off a bend, fell into the stream ourselves in the middle of the caravan. The branches of the trees met over our heads, and the bed of the stream was so broken and stony that the mules constantly stumbled and fell. Leaving this, and continuing on a road the same as before, in an hour we reached the foot of the mountain. The ascent began precipitously, and by an extraordinary passage. It was a narrow gully, worn by the tracks of mules and the washing of mountain torrents so deep that the sides were higher than our heads, and so narrow that we could barely pass through without touching. Our whole caravan moved singly through these muddy defiles, the muleteers scattered among them and on the bank above, extricating the mules as they stuck fast, raising them as they fell, arranging their cargoes, cursing, shouting, and lashing them on. If one stopped, all behind were blocked up, unable to turn. Any sudden start pressed us against the sides of the gully, and there was no small danger of getting a leg crushed. Emerging from this defile, we came again among deep mudholes and projecting roots of trees, with the additional difficulty of a steep ascent. The trees, too, were larger, and their roots higher and extending farther; and, above all, the mahogany-tree threw out its giant roots, high at the trunk and tapering, not

round, like the roots of other trees, but straight, with sharp edges, traversing rocks and the roots of other trees. It was the last of the rainy season; the heavy rains from which we had suffered at sea had deluged the mountain, and it was in the worst state, to be passable; for sometimes it is not passable at all. For the last few days there had been no rain; but we had hardly congratulated ourselves upon our good fortune in having a clear day, when the forest became darker and the rain poured. The woods were of impenetrable thickness; and there was no view except that of the detestable path before us. For five long hours we were dragged through mudholes, squeezed in gulleys, knocked against trees, and tumbled over roots; every step required care and great physical exertion; and, withal, I felt that our inglorious epitaph might be, "tossed over the head of a mule, brained by the trunk of a mahogany-tree, and buried in the mud of the Mico Mountain." We attempted to walk, but the rocks and roots were so slippery, the mudholes so deep, and the ascents and descents so steep, that it was impossible to continue.

The mules were only half loaded, and even then several broke down; the lash could not move them; and scarcely one passed over without a fall. Of our immediate party, mine fell first. Finding that I could not save her with the rein, by an exertion that strained every nerve I lifted myself from off her back, and flung clear of roots and trees, but not of mud; and I had an escape from a worse danger: my dagger fell from its sheath and stood upright, with the handle in the mud, a foot of naked blade. Mr. Catherwood was thrown with such violence, that for a few moments, feeling the helplessness of our condition, I was horror-struck. Long before this he had broken silence to utter an exclamation which seemed to come from the bottom of his heart, that, if he had known of this "mountain," I might have come to Central America alone; if I had had any tendency to be a little uplifted by the honours I received at Balize, I was brought down by this high way to my capital. Shortly after Augustin's mule fell backward; he kicked his feet out of the stirrups, and attempted to slide off behind; but the mule rolled, and caught him with his left leg under, and, but for his kicking, I should have thought that every bone in his body was broken. The mule kicked worse than he; but they rose together, and without any damage except the mud, which before lay upon them in spots, was now formed into a regular plaster.

We were toiling on toward the top of the mountain, when, at a sudden turn, we met a solitary traveller. He was a tall, dark-complexioned man, with a broad-brimmed Panama hat, rolled up at the sides; a striped woollen Guatemala jacket, with fringe at the bottom;

plaid pantaloons, leather spatterdashes, spurs, and sword; he was mounted on a noble mule with a high-peaked saddle, and the butts of a pair of horseman's pistols peeped out of the holsters. His face was covered with sweat and mud; his breast and legs were spattered, and his right side was a complete incrustation; altogether, his appearance was fearful. It seemed strange to meet any one on such a road; and, to our surprise, he accosted us in English. He had set out with muleteers and Indians, but had lost them in some of the windings of the woods, and was seeking his way alone. He had crossed the mountain twice before, but had never known it so bad; he had been thrown twice; once his mule rolled over him, and nearly crushed him; and now she was so frightened that he could hardly urge her along. He dismounted, and the trembling beast and his own exhausted state confirmed all that he had said. He asked us for brandy, wine, or water, anything to revive him; but, unfortunately, our stores were ahead, and for him to go back one step was out of the question. Imagine our surprise, when, with his feet buried in the mud, he told us that he had been two years in Guatemala "negotiating" for a bank charter. Fresh as I was from the land of banks, I almost thought he intended a fling at me; but he did not look like one in a humour for jesting; and, for the benefit of those who will regard it as an evidence of incipient improvement, I am able to state that he had the charter secured when he rolled over in the mud, and was then on his way to England to sell the stock. He told us, too, what seemed in better keeping with the scene, that Carrera had marched toward St. Salvador, and a battle was daily expected between him and Morazan.

But neither of us had time to lose; and parting, though with some reluctance, almost as abruptly as we had met, we continued our ascent. At one o'clock, to our inexpressible satisfaction, we reached the top of the mountain. Here we found a clearing of about two hundred feet in diameter, made for the benefit of benighted muleteers; in different places were heaps of ashes and burned stumps of wood, the remains of their fires. It was the only place on the mountain which the sun could reach, and here the ground was dry; but the view was bounded by the clearing.

We dismounted, and would have lunched, but had no water to drink; and, after a few minutes' rest, resumed our journey. The descent was as bad as the ascent; and, instead of stopping to let the mules breathe, as they had done in ascending, the muleteers seemed anxious to determine in how short a time they could tumble them down the mountain. In one of the muddiest defiles we were shut up by the falling of a mule before, and the crowding upon us of all

behind; and, at the first convenient place, we stopped until the whole caravan had passed. The carefulness of the mules was extraordinary: for an hour I watched the movements of the one before me. At times he put one of his fore feet on a root or stone, and tried it as a man would; sometimes he drew his fore legs out of a bed of mud from the shoulders, and sometimes it was one continued alternation of sinking and pulling out.

This is the great high road to the city of Guatemala, which has always been a place of distinction in Spanish America. Almost all the travel and merchandize from Europe passes over it; and our guide said that the reason it was so bad, was because it was traversed by so many mules,—which, in most countries, would have been considered a sufficient reason for making it better.

In two hours we reached a wild river or mountain torrent, foaming and breaking over its rocky bed, and shaded by large trees. It was called *El Arroyo del Muerto*, or *Stream of the Dead*. The muleteers were already distributed on the rocks, or under the shade of the trees, eating their frugal meal of corn-cakes; the mules were in the river, or scattered along the bank; and we selected a large tree, which spread its branches over us like a roof, and so near the stream, that we could dip our drinking-cups into the water.

All the anxiety which I had been able to spare during the day from myself, I had bestowed upon the barometer on the back of the guide. He carried, besides, a small white pitcher, with a red rim, on the belt of his machete, of which he was very proud and very careful; and several times, after a stumble and a narrow escape, he turned round and held up the pitcher with a smile, which gave me hopes of the barometer; and, in fact, he had carried it through without its being broken, but, unfortunately, the quicksilver was not well secured, and the whole had escaped. It was impossible to repair it in Guatemala, and the loss of this barometer was a source of regret during our whole journey; for we ascended many mountains, the heights of which have never been ascertained.

But we had another misadventure, which, at the moment, touched us more nearly. We sat on the ground, Turkish fashion, with a vacant space between us. Augustin placed before us a well-filled napkin; and, as we dipped water from the clear stream by our side, a spirit of other days came over us, and we spoke in contempt of railroads, cities, and hotels. But oh, publicans, you were avenged! We unrolled the napkin, and the scene that presented itself was too shocking even for the strongest nerves. We had provided bread for three days, eggs boiled hard, and two roasted fowls for as long as they might last.

Augustin had forgotten salt, but he had placed in the napkin a large paper of gunpowder, as an adventure of his own. The paper was broken, and the bread, fowls, and eggs were thoroughly seasoned with this new condiment. All the beauty of the scene, all our equanimity, everything except our tremendous appetites, left us in a moment. Country taverns rose up before us; and we, who had been so amiable, abused Augustin, and wished him the whole murderous seasoning in his own body. We could not pick out enough to satisfy hunger. It was, perhaps, the most innocent way of tasting gunpowder, but even so it was a bitter pill. We picked and made excavations for immediate use, but the rest of our stores was lost.

This over, we mounted, and, fording the stream, continued our descent. Passing off by a spur of the mountain, we came out upon an open ridge, commanding a view of an extensive savannah. Very soon we reached a fine table-land, where a large party of muleteers, on their way to Yzabal, were encamped for the night. Bales of indigo, which formed their cargoes, were piled up like a wall: their mules were pasturing quietly near them, and fires were burning to cook their suppers. It was a great satisfaction to be once more in an open country, and to see the mountain, with its dense forest, lighted up by the setting sun, grand and gloomy, and ourselves fairly out of it. With ten hours of the hardest riding I ever went through, we had made only twelve miles.

Descending from this table-land, we entered a plain, thickly wooded, and in a few minutes reached a grove of wild palm-trees of singular beauty. From the top of a tall naked stem grew branches twenty or thirty feet long, spreading from the trunk, and falling outward with a graceful bend, like enormous plumes of feathers. The trees stood so close, that the bending branches met, and formed arches, in some places as regular as if constructed by art; and as we rode among them, there was a solemn stillness, an air of desolation, that reminded us of the columns of an Egyptian temple.

Towards dark we reached the rancho of Mico. It was a small house, built of poles, and plastered with mud. Near it, and connected by a shed thatched with branches, was a larger house, built of the same material, expressly for the use of travellers. This was already occupied by two parties from Guatemala; one of which consisted of the Canonigo Castillo, his clerical companion or secretary, and two of the young Pavons: the other was a French merchant on his way to Paris. Mr. C. and I were picturesque-looking objects, not spattered, but plastered with mud from head to foot; but we were soon known, and received from the whole company a cordial welcome to Central America.

Their appearance was such as gave me a highly favourable opinion of the description of persons I should meet at Guatemala. The canonigo was one of the first men in the country in position and character, and was then on his way to Havana, on a delicate political mission, being sent by the Constituent Assembly to invite back the archbishop, who had been banished by General Morazan ten years before. He undertook to do the honours, and set before us chocolate, and, what he called the "national dish," frigoles, or black beans fried, which, fortunately for our subsequent travels, we "cottoned" to at once. We were very tired, but agreeable company was better than sleep. The canonigo had been educated at Rome, and passed the early part of his life in Europe; the Frenchman was from Paris; the young Pavons were educated in New York: and we sat till a late hour, our clothes stiff with mud, talking of France, Italy, and our home. At length we hung up our hammocks. We had been so much occupied, that we had paid no attention to our luggage; and when we wanted to procure a change of raiment, could not find our men, and were obliged to turn in as we were; but, with the satisfactory feeling that we had passed "the mountain," we soon fell asleep.