

CHAPTER IV.

PURCHASING A BRIDLE—A SCHOOL AND ITS REGULATIONS—CONVERSATION WITH AN INDIAN—
CHIQUMULA—A CHURCH IN RUINS—A VETERAN OF THE FRENCH EMPIRE—ST. STEPHANOS—
A LAND OF MOUNTAINS—AN AFFAIR WITH A MULETEER—A DESERTED VILLAGE—A RUDE
ASSAULT—ARREST—IMPRISONMENT—RELEASE.

THE next day we were obliged to wait for our muleteer. Our guide of the night before had stolen one of our bridles; and here we found the beginning of an annoyance which attended us throughout Central America, in the difficulty of buying anything ready made. There was a blacksmith who had a bit partly made, but had not charcoal enough to finish it. Fortunately, during the day an Indian arrived with a back-load, and the bridle was completed. The headstall we bought of a saddler, and the reins, which were of platted leather like the lash of a whip, we were lucky enough to obtain ready made. The arrival of the charcoal enabled the blacksmith to fit us out with one pair of spurs.

At Zacapa, for the first time, we saw a school-house. It was a respectable-looking building, with columns in front, and against the wall hung a large card, headed—

"1st Decurion (a student who has the care of ten other students). 2d Decurion.
MONITOR, &c.

"Interior regulation for the good government of the school of first letters of this town,
which ought to be observed strictly by all the boys composing it," &c.

with a long list of complicated articles, declaring the rewards and punishments. The school, for the government of which these regulations were intended, consisted of five boys, two besides the decurions and monitor. It was nearly noon, and the master, who was the clerk of the alcalde, had not yet made his appearance. The only books I saw were a Catholic prayer-book and a translation of Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws. The boys were fine little fellows, half white; and with one of them I had a trial of sums in addition, and then of exercises in hand-writing, in which he showed himself very proficient, writing in Spanish, in a hand which I could not mistake, "Give me sixpence."

We were rather at a loss what to do with ourselves, but in the afternoon our host called in an Indian for the purpose of enabling us to make a vocabulary of Indian words. The first question I asked him was the name of God, to which he answered, Santissima Trinidad, "The

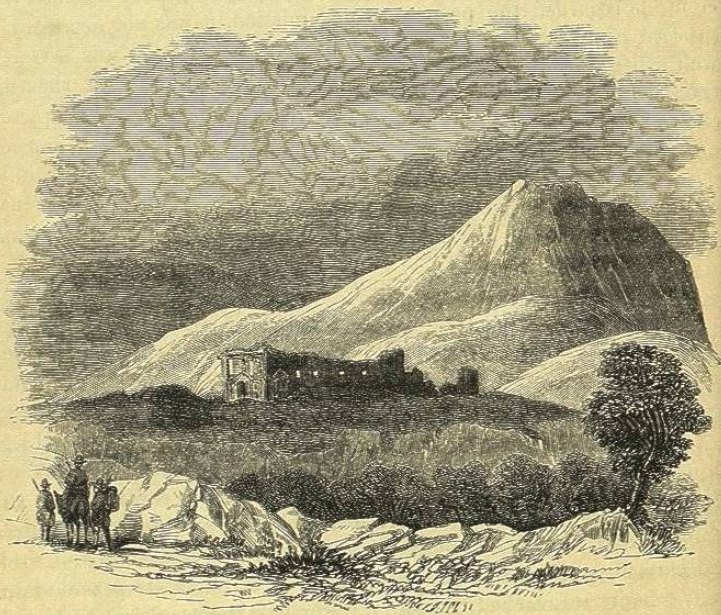
Holy Trinity." Through our host I explained to him that I did not wish the Spanish, but the Indian name, and he answered as before, Santissima Trinidad, or Dios, "God." I shaped my question in a variety of ways, but could get no other answer. He was of a tribe called Chinaute, and the inference was, either that they had never known any Great Spirit who governed and directed the universe, or that they had undergone such an entire change in matters of religion that they had lost their own appellation for the Deity.

Our muleteer did not make his appearance till late the next day. In the meantime, I had an opportunity of acquiring much information about the roads and the state of the country; and, being satisfied that so far as regarded the purpose of my mission, it was not necessary to proceed immediately to Guatemala, and, in fact, that it was better to wait a little while and see the result of the convulsions that then distracted the country, we determined to visit Copan. It was completely out of the line of travel, and, though distant only a few days' journey, in a region of country but little known, even at Zacapa; but our muleteer said that he knew the road, and made a contract to conduct us thither in three days, arranging the different stages beforehand, and from thence direct to Guatemala.

At seven o'clock the next morning we started. Although both my companion and myself were old travellers, our luggage was in bad packages for travelling with mules over a mountainous country—hard to put on and easy to fall off; and, in keeping with this, we had but one pair of spurs between us. In an hour we forded the Motagua, still a broad stream, deep, and with a rapid current; and coming out with our feet and legs wet diminished somewhat the regret with which we bade farewell for a while to the beautiful river. For an hour longer we continued on the plain of Zacapa, cultivated for corn and cochineal, and divided by fences of brush and cactus. Beyond this the country became broken, arid, and barren, and very soon we commenced ascending a steep mountain. In two hours we reached the top, three or four thousand feet high, and, looking back, had a fine view of the plain and town of Zacapa. Crossing the ridge, we reached a bold precipitous spur, and very soon saw before us another extensive plain, and, afar off, the town of Chiquimula, with its giant church. On each side were immense ravines, and the opposite heights were covered with pale and rose-coloured mimosa. We descended by a long and zigzag path, and reached the plain, on which were growing corn, cochineal, and plantain. Once more fording a stream, we ascended a bank, and at two o'clock entered Chiquimula, the head of the department of that name. In the centre of the plaza was a fine fountain, shaded by palm-trees, at which women were filling their

water-jars, and on the sides were the church and cabildo. In one corner was a house, to which we were attracted by the appearance of a woman at the door. I may call her a lady, for she wore a frock not open behind, and shoes and stockings, and had a face of uncommon interest, dark, and with finely-pencilled eyebrows. To heighten the effect of her appearance, she gave us a gracious welcome to her house, and in a few minutes the shed was lumbered with our multifarious luggage.

After a slight lunch we took our guns, and, walking down to the edge of the table land, saw, what had attracted our attention at a great distance, a gigantic church in ruins. It was seventy-five feet front and two



hundred and fifty feet deep, and the walls were ten feet thick. The façade was adorned with ornaments and figures of the saints, larger than life. The roof had fallen, and inside were huge masses of stone and mortar, and a thick growth of trees. It was built by the Spaniards on the site of the old Indian village; but, having been twice shattered by earthquakes, the inhabitants had deserted it, and built the town where it now stands. The ruined village was now occupied as a campo santo, or burial-place; inside the church were the graves of the principal inhabitants, and in the niches of the wall were the bones of priests and

monks, with their names written under them. Outside were the graves of the common people, untended and uncared for, with the barrow of laced sticks, which had carried the body to the grave, laid upon the top, and slightly covered with earth. The bodies had decayed, the dirt fallen in, and the graves were yawning. Around this scene of desolation and death nature was rioting in beauty; the ground was covered with flowers, and parrots on every bush and tree, and flying in flocks over our heads, wanton in gaiety of colours, with senseless chattering disturbed the stillness of the grave.

We returned to the town, and found about twelve hundred soldiers drawn up in the plaza for evening parade. Their aspect was ferocious and banditti-like, and it was refreshing to see convicts peeping through the gratings of the prison, and walking in chains on the plaza, as it gave an idea that sometimes crimes were punished. With all their ferocity of appearance, the officers, mounted on prancing mules or very small horses, almost hidden in saddle-cloth and armour, wore an air bordering upon the mock heroic. While we were looking at them, General Cascara, the commandant of the department, attended by a servant, rode up to the line. He was an Italian, upwards of sixty, who had served under Napoleon in Italy, and on the downfall of the Emperor had fled to Central America. Banished by Morazan, and eight years in exile, he had just returned to the country, and six months before had been appointed to this command. He was ghastly pale, and evidently in feeble health; and I could not but think that, if recollections of the pomp of war under the Emperor ever crossed his mind, he must needs blush at his barefooted detachment.

He returned to his house, whither we followed and presented our passport. Like the commandant at Yzabal, he seemed ill at ease, and spoke much of the distracted state of the country. He was dissatisfied, too, with the route I proposed taking; and though I told him it was merely to visit the ruins of Copan, he was evidently apprehensive that I intended going to San Salvador to present my credentials to the Federal government. He *viséd* the passport, however, as I required; though, after we left, he called Augustin back, and questioned him very closely as to our purposes. I was indignant, but smothered my feelings in consideration of the distracted state of the country, and the game of life and death that was then playing throughout the land.

We returned to the house and the interesting lady who had welcomed us to it. As yet we did not know whether she was *señora* or *señorita*, but, unhappily, we found that a man whom we supposed her father was her husband. When we inquired of her about a fine boy ten years old, whom we supposed to be her brother, she answered, "es mio," he is

mine; and, as if it was fated that the charm of her appearance should be broken, when, according to the rules of courtesy, I offered for her choice a cigar and a puro, she took the latter. But it was so long since I had seen a woman who was at all attractive, and her face was so interesting, her manners were so good, her voice so sweet, the Spanish words rolled so beautifully from her lips, and her frock was tied so close behind, that, in spite of ten-year-old boy and puro, I clung to my first impressions.

The next morning we rose early. Our interesting hostess and her fatherly husband were up betimes to assist us. It would have been an offence to the laws of hospitality to offer them money; but Mr. C. gave the boy a penknife, and I put on the finger of the señora a gold ring with the motto, "Souvenir d'amitié." It was in French, and her husband could not understand it, nor, unfortunately, could she.

At seven o'clock we started. Passing the ruined church and the old village, we rode over a rich valley so well cultivated with Indian corn that it gave a key to the boy's question, Whether we had come to Chiquimula to buy maize? At a league's distance we came to the village of San Estevan, where, amid a miserable collection of thatched huts, stood a gigantic church, like that at Chiquimula, roofless, and falling to ruins. We were now in a region which had been scourged by civil war. A year before the village had been laid waste by the troops of Morazan.

Passing the village, we came upon the bank of a stream, in some places diverted into water-courses for irrigating the land; and on the other side of the stream was a range of high mountains. Continuing along it, we met an Indian, who told our muleteer that the camino real for Copan was on the opposite side of the river, and across the range of mountains. We returned and forded the river; a great part of the bed was dry, and we rode along it for some distance, but could find no path that led up the mountain. At length we struck one, but it proved to be a cattle-path, and we wandered for more than an hour before we found the camino real; and this royal road was barely a track by which a single mule could climb. It was evident that our muleteer did not know the road, and the region we were entering was so wild that we had some doubts about following him. At eleven we reached the top of the mountain; and, looking back, saw at a great distance, and far below us, the town of Chiquimula; on the right, up the valley, the village of St. Helena; and, rising above a few thatched huts, another gigantic and roofless church. On each side were mountains still higher than ours, some grand and gloomy, with their summits buried in the clouds; others in the form of cones and pyramids,

so wild and fantastic that they seemed sporting with the heavens, and I almost wished for wings to fly and light upon their tops. Here, on heights apparently inaccessible, we saw the wild hut of an Indian, with his milpa, or patch of Indian corn. Clouds gathered around the mountains, and for an hour we rode in the rain; when the sun broke through we saw the mountain tops still towering above us, and on our right, far below us, a deep valley. We descended, and found it narrower and more beautiful than any we had yet seen, bounded by ranges of mountains several thousand feet high, and having on its left a range of extraordinary beauty, with a red soil of sandstone, without any brush or underwood, and covered with gigantic pines. In front, rising above the miserable huts of the village, and seeming to bestride the valley, was the gigantic church of St. John the Hermit, reminding me of the Church of St. John in the wilderness of Judea, but the situation was even more beautiful. At two o'clock we crossed the stream and entered the village. Opposite the church the muleteer told us that the day's work was over, but, with all our toils, we had made only fifteen miles, and were unwilling to stop so soon. The exceeding beauty of the place might have tempted us, but the only good plastered hut was occupied by a band of ruffianly soldiers, and we rode on. The muleteer followed with curses, and vented his spite in lashing the mules. Again we crossed the stream, and continuing up the valley along the dry bed, which bore marks of the flood that washed it in the rainy season, in an hour we crossed it half a dozen times. Heavy clouds rested on the mountains, and again we had rain. At four o'clock we saw on a high table land on the left, the village of Jocotan, with another gigantic church. According to the route agreed upon with the muleteer, this should have been the end of our first day's journey. We had been told that the cura could give us much information about the ruins of Copan, and told him to cross over and stop there; but he refused, and, hurrying on the mules, added that we had refused to stop when he wished, and now he would not stop for us. I could not spur my mule beyond her own gait, and, unable to overtake him, jumped off and ran after him on foot. Accidentally I put my hand on my pistols, to steady them in my belt, and he fell back and drew his machete. We came to a parley. He said that if we went there we could not reach Copan the next day; whereupon, willing to make a retreat, and wishing to leave him no excuse for failing, we continued.

At six o'clock we rose upon a beautiful table land, on which stood another gigantic church. It was the seventh we had seen that day, and, coming upon them in a region of desolation, and by mountain

paths which human hands had never attempted to improve, their colossal grandeur and costliness were startling, and gave evidence of a retrograding and expiring people. This stood in a more desolate place than any we had yet seen. The grass was green, the sod unbroken even by a mule path, not a human being was in sight, and even the gratings of the prison had no one looking through them. It was, in fact, a picture of a deserted village. We rode up to the cabildo, the door of which was fastened and the shed barricaded, probably to prevent the entrance of straggling cattle. We tore away the fastenings, broke open the door, and, unloading the mules, sent Augustin on a foraging expedition. In half an hour he returned with *one* egg, being all that he was able to procure; but he had waked up the village, and the alcalde, an Indian with a silver-headed cane, and several alguazils with long thin rods or wands of office, came down to examine us. We showed them our passport, and told them where we were going, at which, with their characteristic indifference of manner, they expressed no surprise. They could not read the passport, but they examined the seal and returned it. We asked them for eggs, fowls, milk, &c., to all of which they answered, what afterwards became but too familiar, "no hay," "there is none," and in a few minutes they retired and left us to ourselves.

The cabildo was about forty feet long and twenty broad, with plastered walls; its furniture consisted of a large table and two benches with high backs, and the alcalde sent us a jar of water. We abused the muleteer for stopping at a place where we could get nothing to eat, and made our dinner and supper upon bread and chocolate, taking care not to give him any. There were pegs in the walls for swinging hammocks, and in the evening we prepared for sleep. Mr. C. was in his hammock, and I half undressed, when the door was suddenly burst open, and twenty-five or thirty men rushed in, the alcalde, alguazils, soldiers, Indians, and Mestizoes, ragged and ferocious-looking fellows, and armed with staves of office, swords, clubs, muskets, and machetes, and carrying blazing pine sticks. At the head of them was a young officer of about twenty-eight or thirty, with a glazed hat and sword, and a knowing and wicked expression, whom we afterward understood to be a captain of one of Carrera's companies. The alcalde was evidently intoxicated, and said that he wished to see my passport again. I delivered it to him, and he handed it over to the young officer, who examined it, and said that it was not valid. In the meantime, Mr. Catherwood and I dressed ourselves. I was not very familiar with the Spanish language, and, through Augustin, explained my official character, and directed him particularly to the endorsements of Com-

mandant Peñol and General Cascara. He paid no regard to my explanations; the alcalde said that he had seen a passport once before, and that it was printed, and on a small piece of paper not bigger than his hand; whereas mine was the one given by government on a quarto sheet. Besides this, they said that the seal of General Cascara was only that of the department of Chiquimula, and it ought to be that of the State of Guatemala. I did all in my power to show the insufficiency of these objections; but, after a warm altercation, the young man said that we should not proceed on our journey, but must remain at Comotan until information could be sent to Chiquimula, and orders received from that place. We had no disposition to remain in such hands; threatened them with the consequences of throwing any obstructions in our way; and I at length said that, rather than be detained there and lose time, we would abandon the journey to Copan altogether, and return by the road on which we came; but both the officer and the alcalde said peremptorily that we should not leave Comotan.

The young man then told me to give up my passport. I answered that the passport was given me by my own government; that it was the evidence of my official character, necessary for my personal security, and I would not give it up. Mr. Catherwood made a learned exposition of the law of nations, the right of an ambassador, and the danger of bringing down upon them the vengeance of the government del Norte; which I sustained with some warmth, but it was of no use. At length I told him again that I would not give up the passport, but offered to go with it myself, under a guard of soldiers, to Chiquimula, or wherever else they chose to send it. He answered, insultingly, that we should not go to Chiquimula, or anywhere else,—neither forward nor backward; that we must stay where we were, and must give up the passport. Finding arguments and remonstrances of no use, I placed the paper inside my vest, buttoned my coat tight across my breast, and told him he must get it by force; and the officer, with a gleam of satisfaction crossing his villanous face, responded that he would. I added that, whatever might be the immediate result, it would ultimately be fatal to them; to which he answered, with a sneer, that they would run the risk. During the whole time, the band of cowardly ruffians stood with their hands on their swords and machetes, and two assassin-looking scoundrels sat on a bench, with muskets against their shoulders, and the muzzles pointed within three feet of my breast. If we had been longer in the country, we should have been more alarmed; but as yet we did not know the sanguinary character of the people, and the whole proceeding was so outrageous and insulting that it roused our indignation more than our fears.

Augustin, who, from having had a cut across the head with a machete, which did not kill him, was always bellicose, begged me in French to give the order to fire, and said that one round would scatter them all. We had eleven charges, all sure: we were excited, and if the young man himself had laid his hands upon me, I think I should have knocked him down at least; but, most fortunately, before he had time to give his order to fall upon us, a man, who entered after the rest, of a better class, wearing a glazed hat and round-about jacket, stepped forward, and asked to see the passport. I was determined not to trust it out of my hands, and held it up before a blazing pine-stick while he read it, and, at Mr. Catherwood's request, aloud.

I have since doubted whether even the officer had read it, or, if so, whether he had communicated its contents; for it produced an effect upon the alcalde and his alguazils; and, after some moments of anxious suspense to us, they forbore to execute their threat, but said that we must remain in custody. I demanded a courier, to carry a letter immediately to General Cascara, which they refused; but on my offering to pay the expense of the courier, the alcalde promised to send it. Knowing General Cascara to be an Italian, and afraid to trust my Spanish, I wrote a note, which Mr. C. translated into Italian, informing him of our arrest and imprisonment; that we had exhibited to the alcalde and soldiers who arrested us my special passport from my own government, with the endorsements of Commandant Peñol and himself, certifying my official character, which were not deemed sufficient; demanding to be set at liberty immediately, and allowed to proceed on our journey without farther molestation; and adding that we should, of course, represent to the government at Guatemala, and also to my own, the manner in which we had been treated. Not to mince matters, Mr. Catherwood signed the note as Secretary; and, having no official seal with me, we sealed it, unobserved by anybody, with a new American half-dollar, and gave it to the alcalde. The eagle spread his wings, and the stars glittered in the torchlight. All gathered round to examine it, and retired, locking us up in the cabildo, stationing twelve men at the door with swords, muskets, and machetes; and, at parting, the officer told the alcalde that, if we escaped during the night, his head should answer for it.

The excitement over, Mr. C. and I were exhausted. We had made a beautiful beginning of our travels—but a month from home, and in the hands of men who would have been turned out of any decent prison lest they should contaminate the inmates. A peep at our beautiful keepers did not reassure us. They were sitting under the shed, directly before the door, around a fire, their arms within reach, and

smoking cigars. Their whole stock of wearing apparel was not worth a pair of old boots; and with their rags, their arms, their dark faces reddened by the firelight, their appearance was ferocious; and, doubtless, if we had attempted to escape, they would have been glad of the excuse for murder. We opened a basket of wine with which Colonel M'Donald had provided us, and drank his health. We were relieved from immediate apprehensions, but our prospects were not pleasant; and, fastening the door as well as we could inside, we betook ourselves once more to our hammocks.

During the night, the door was again burst open, and the whole ruffianly band entered, as before, with swords, muskets, machetes, and blazing pine-sticks. In an instant we were on our feet; and my hurried impression was that they had come to take the passport; but, to our surprise, the alcalde handed me back the letter with the big seal, said there was no use in sending it, and that we were at liberty to proceed on our journey when we chose.

We were too well pleased to ask any questions, and to this day do not know why we were arrested. My belief is, that if we had quailed at all, and had not kept up a high, threatening tone to the last, we should not have been set free; and I have no doubt that the big seal did much in our behalf. Our indignation, however, was not the less strong that we considered ourselves safe in pouring it out. We insisted that the matter should not end here, and that the letter should go to General Cascara. The alcalde objected; but we told him that, if not sent, it would be the worse for him; and, after some delay, he thrust it into the hands of an Indian, and beat him out of doors with his staff: and in a few minutes the guard was withdrawn, and they all left us.

It was now nearly daylight, and we did not know what to do: to continue was to expose ourselves to a repetition of the same treatment, and perhaps, as we advanced farther into the interior, with a worse result. Undetermined, for the third time we turned into our hammocks. At broad daylight, we were again roused by the alcalde and his alguazils; but this time they came to pay us a visit of ceremony. The soldiers, who had accidentally passed through the village, and had made all the disturbance, had left. After some deliberation, we determined to continue; and, charging the alcalde again about the letter to General Cascara, turned our backs upon him and his alguazils. In a few minutes they all withdrew. We took a cup of chocolate, loaded our mules, and, when we left, the place was as desolate as when we entered. Not a person had been there to welcome us, and there was not one to bid us farewell.