

bodies heated when we emerged from the fiery forest. For a few moments the open air was delightful; but we were hardly out of one trouble before we had another. Swarms of enormous flies, perhaps driven out by the fire, and hovering on the borders of the burned district, fell upon the mules. Every bite drew blood, and the tormentors clung to the suffering animals until brushed off by a stick. For an hour we laboured hard, but could not keep their heads and necks free. The poor beasts were almost frantic, and, in spite of all we could do, their necks, the inside of their legs, mouths, ears, nostrils, and every tender part of their skin, were trickling with blood. Hurrying on, in three hours we saw the Church of San Antonio Güista, and in a few minutes entered the village, beautifully situated on a table-land projecting from the slope of a mountain, looking upon an immense opening, and commanding on all sides a magnificent view. At this time we were beyond the reach of war, and free from all apprehensions. With the addition of Pawling's pistols and double-barrelled gun, a faithful muleteer, Santiago, and Juan on his legs again, we could have stormed an Indian village, and locked up a refractory alcalde in his own cabildo. We took possession of San Antonio Güista, dividing ourselves between the cabildo and the convent, sent for the alcalde (even on the borders of Central America the name of Carrera was omnipotent), and told him to stay there and wait upon us, or send an alguazil.

The alcalde and his major had roused the village. In a few moments, instead of the mortifying answer "no hay," there is none, the provision made for us was almost equal to the offers of the Turkish paradise. Twenty or thirty women were in the convent at one time, with baskets of corn, tortillas, dolces, plantains, hocotes, sapotes, and a variety of other fruits, each one's stock in trade being of the value of three half-pence; and among them was a species of tortillas, thin and baked hard, about 12 inches in diameter, 120 for three pence, of which, as they were not expensive, we laid in a large supply.

At this place our muleteer was to leave us. We had but one cargo-mule fit for service, and applied to the alcalde for two carriers to go with us across the frontier to Comitan. He went out, as he said, to consult with the mozos, and told us that they asked six dollars apiece. We spoke to him of our friend Carrera, and on a second consultation the demand was reduced by two-thirds. We were obliged to make provisions for three days, and even to carry corn for the mules; and Juan and Santiago had a busy night, boiling fowls and eggs.

CHAPTER XXX.

COMFORTABLE LODGINGS—JOURNEY CONTINUED—STONY ROAD—BEAUTIFUL RIVER—SUSPENSION BRIDGE—THE DOLORES—RIO LAGERTERO—ENTHUSIASM BROUGHT DOWN—ANOTHER BRIDGE—ENTRY INTO MEXICO—A BATH—A SOLITARY CHURCH—A SCENE OF BARRENNESS—ZAPOLUTA—COMITAN—ANOTHER COUNTRYMAN—MORE PERPLEXITIES—OFFICIAL COURTESY—TRADE OF COMITAN—SMUGGLING—SCARCITY OF SOAP.

THE next morning we found the convent was so comfortable, we were so abundantly served, the alcalde or his major, staff in hand, being in constant attendance, and the situation so beautiful, that we were in no hurry to go; but the alcalde told us that all was ready. We did not see our carriers, and found that he and his major were the mozos whom he had consulted. They could not let slip two dollars a-piece, and laying down their staves and dignity, bared their backs, placed the straps across their foreheads, took up the loads, and trotted off.

We started at five minutes before eight. The weather was fine, but hazy. From the village we descended a hill to an extensive stony plain, and at about a league's distance reached the brink of a precipice, from which we looked down into a rich oblong valley, 2,000 or 3,000 feet deep, shut in all around by a mountain wall, and seeming an immense excavation. Toward the other end of the valley was a village with a ruined church, and the road led up a precipitous ascent to a plain on the same level with that on which we stood, undulating and boundless as the sea. Below us it seemed as if we could drop a stone to the bottom. We descended by one of the steepest and most stony paths we had yet encountered in the country, crossing and recrossing in a zigzag course along the side of the height, perhaps making the descent a mile and a half long. Very soon we reached the bank of a beautiful river, running lengthwise through the valley, bordered on each side by immense trees, throwing their branches clear across, and their roots washed by the stream; and while the plain beyond was dry and parched, they were green and luxuriant. Riding along it, we reached a suspension bridge of most primitive appearance and construction, called by the natives La Hammaca, which had existed there from time immemorial. It was made of oziars twisted into cords, about three feet apart, and stretched across the river with a hanging network of vines, the ends fastened to the trunks of two opposite trees. It hung about twenty-five feet above the river, which was here some eighty feet wide, and was supported in different places by vines tied

to the branches. The access was by a rude ladder to a platform in the crotch of the tree. In the bottom of the hammaca were two or three poles to walk on. It waved with the wind, and was an unsteady and rather insecure means of transportation. From the centre the vista of the river both ways under the arches of the trees was beautiful, and in every direction the hammaca was a most picturesque-looking object. We continued on to the village, and after a short halt and a smoke with the alcalde, rode on to the extreme end of the valley, and by a steep and stony ascent, at twenty minutes past twelve reached the level ground above. Here we dismounted, slipped the bridles of our mules, and seated ourselves to wait for our Indians, looking down into the deep embosomed valley, and back at the great range of Cordilleras, crowned by the Sierra Madre, seeming a barrier fit to separate worlds.

Free from all apprehensions, we were now in the full enjoyment of the wild country and wild mode of travelling. But our poor Indians, perhaps, did not enjoy it so much. The usual load was from three to four arrobas, seventy-five to one hundred pounds; ours were not more than fifty; but the sweat rolled in streams down their naked bodies, and every limb trembled. After a short rest they started again. The day was hot and sultry, the ground dry, parched, and stony. We had two sharp descents, and reached the River Dolores. On both sides were large trees, furnishing a beautiful shade, which, after our scorching ride, we found delightful. The river was about 300 feet broad. In the rainy season it is impassable, but in the dry season not more than three or four feet deep, very clear, and the colour a greyish green, probably from the reflection of the trees. We had had no water since we left the suspension bridge, and both our mules and we were intemperate.

We remained here half an hour; and now apprehensions, which had been operating more or less all the time, made us feel very uncomfortable. We were approaching, and very near, the frontier of Mexico. This road was so little travelled, that, as we were told, there was no regular guard; but piquets of soldiers were scouring the whole line of frontier to prevent smuggling, who might consider us contraband. Our passports were good for going out of Central America; but to go into Mexico, the passport of the Mexican authorities at Ciudad Real, four days' journey, was necessary. Turning back was not in our vocabulary; perhaps we should be obliged to wait in the wilderness till we could send for one.

In half an hour we reached the Rio Lagertero, the boundary line between Guatemala and Mexico, a scene of wild and surpassing beauty,

with banks shaded by some of the noblest trees of the tropical forests, water as clear as crystal, and fish a foot long playing in it as gently as if there were no such things as fish-hooks. No soldiers were visible; all was as desolate as if no human being had ever crossed the boundary before. We had a moment's consultation on which side to encamp, and determined to make a lodgment in Mexico. I was riding Pawling's horse, and spurred him into the water, to be the first to touch the soil. With one plunge his fore-feet were off the bottom, and my legs under water. For an instant I hesitated; but as the water rose to my holsters my enthusiasm gave way, and I wheeled back into Central America. As we afterward found, the water was ten or twelve feet deep.

We waited for the Indians, in some doubt whether it would be possible to cross at all with the luggage. At a short distance above was a ledge of rocks, forming rapids, over which there had been a bridge with a wooden arch and stone abutments, the latter of which were still standing, the bridge having been carried away by the rising of the waters seven years before. It was the last of the dry season; the rocks were in some places dry, the body of the river running in channels on each side, and a log was laid to them from the abutments of the bridge. We took off the saddles and bridles of the mules, and cautiously, with the water breaking rapidly up to the knees, carried everything across by hand; an operation in which an hour was consumed. One night's rain on the mountains would have made it impassable. The mules were then swum across, and we were all landed safely in Mexico.

On the bank opposite the place where I attempted to cross was a semicircular clearing, from which the only opening was the path leading into the Mexican provinces. We closed this up, and turned the mules loose, hung our traps on the trees, and bivouacked in the centre. The men built a fire, and while they were preparing supper we went down to the river to bathe. The rapids were breaking above us. The wildness of the scene, its seclusion and remoteness, the clearness of the water, the sense of having accomplished an important part of our journey, all revived our physical and moral being. Clean apparel consummated the glory of the bath. For several days our digestive organs had been out of order, but when we sat down to supper they could have undertaken the bridles of the mules; and my brave macho—it was a pleasure to hear him crunch his corn. We were out of Central America, safe from the dangers of revolution, and stood on the wild borders of Mexico, in good health, with good appetites, and something to eat. We had still a tremendous journey before us, but it

seemed nothing. We strode the little clearing as proudly as the conquerors of Mexico, and in our extravagance resolved to have a fish for breakfast. We had no hooks, and there was not even a pin in our travelling equipage; but we had needles and thread. Pawling, with the experience of seven years' "roughing," had expedients, and put a needle in the fire, which softened its temper, so that he bent it into a hook. A pole was on every tree, and we could see the fish in the water; all that we wanted was for them to open their mouths and hook themselves to the needle; but this they would not do, and for this reason alone we had none for breakfast. We returned. Our men cut some poles, and resting them in the crotch of a tree, covered them with branches. We spread our mats under, and our roof and beds were ready. The men piled logs of wood on the fire, and our sleep was sound and glorious.

At daylight the next morning we were again in the water. Our bath was even better than that of the night before, and when I mounted I felt able to ride through Mexico and Texas to my own door in New York. Returned once more to steamboats and railroads, how flat, tame, and insipid all their comforts seem.

We started at half-past seven. At a very short distance three wild boars crossed our path, all within gunshot; but our men carried the guns, and in an instant it was too late. Very soon we emerged from woods that bordered the river, and came out into an open plain. At half-past eight we crossed a low stony hill, and came to the dry bed of a river. The bottom was flat and baked hard, and the sides smooth and regular as those of a canal. At the distance of half a league water appeared, and at half-past nine it became a considerable stream. We again entered a forest, and riding by a narrow path, saw directly before us, closing the passage, the side of a large church. We came out, and saw the whole gigantic building, without a single habitation, or the vestige of one, in sight. The path led across the broken wall of the courtyard. We dismounted in the deep shade of the front. The façade was rich and perfect. It was 60 feet front and 250 feet deep, but roofless, with trees growing out of the area above the walls. Nothing could exceed the quiet and desolation of the scene; but there was something strangely interesting in these roofless churches, standing in places entirely unknown. Santiago told us that this was called Conata, and the tradition is, that it was once so rich that the inhabitants carried their water-jars by silken cords. Giving our mules to Santiago, we entered the open doorway of the church. The altar was thrown down, the roof lay in broken masses on the ground, and the whole area was a forest of trees. At the foot of the church, and

connected with it, was a convent. There was no roof, but the apartments were entire as when a good padre stood to welcome a traveller. In front of the church, on each side, was a staircase leading up to a belfry in the centre of the façade. We ascended to the top. The bells which had called to matin and vesper prayers were gone; the crosspiece was broken from the cross. The stone of the belfry was solid masses of petrified shells, worms, leaves, and insects. On one side we looked down into the roofless area, and on the other over a region of waste. One man had written his name there:

Joaquin Rodrigues,
Conata, Mayo 1^o, 1836.

We wrote our names under his and descended, mounted, rode over a stony and desolate country, crossed a river, and saw before us a range of hills, and beyond a range of mountains. Then we came upon a bleak stony table-land, and after riding four hours and a half, saw the road leading across a barren mountain on our right, and, afraid we had missed our way, halted under a low spreading tree to wait for our men. We turned the mules loose, and, after waiting some time, sent Santiago back to look for them. The wind was sweeping over the plain, and while Mr. Catherwood was cutting wood, Pawling and I descended to a ravine to look for water. The bed was entirely dry, and one took his course up and the other down. Pawling found a muddy hole in a rock, which, even to thirsty men, was not tempting. We returned, and found Mr. Catherwood warming himself by the blaze of three or four young trees, which he had piled one upon another. The wind was at this time sweeping furiously over the plain. Night was approaching; we had not eaten anything since morning; our small stock of provisions was in unsafe hands, and we began to fear that none would be forthcoming. Our mules were as badly off. The pasture was so poor that they required a wide range, and we let all go loose except my poor macho, which, from certain roving propensities acquired before he came into my possession, we were obliged to fasten to a tree. It was some time after dark when Santiago appeared with the alforgas of provisions on his back. He had gone back six miles when he found the track of Juan's foot, one of the squarest ever planted, and followed it to a wretched hut in the woods, at which we had expected to stop. We had lost nothing by not stopping; all they could get to bring away was four eggs. We supped, piled up our trunks to windward, spread our mats, lay down, gazed for a few moments at the stars, and fell asleep. During the night the wind changed, and we were almost blown away.

The next morning, preparatory to entering once more upon habitable regions, we made our toilet; *i.e.* we hung a looking-glass on the branch of a tree, and shaved the upper lip and a small part of the chin. At a quarter past seven we started, having eaten up our last fragment. Since we left Güista we had not seen a human being; the country was still desolate and dreary; there was not a breath of air; hills, mountains, and plains were all barren and stony; but, as the sun peeped above the horizon, its beams gladdened this scene of barrenness. For two hours we ascended a barren stony mountain. Even before this the desolate frontier had seemed almost an impregnable barrier; but Alvarado had crossed it to penetrate an unknown country teeming with enemies, and twice a Mexican army has invaded Central America.

At half-past ten we reached the top of the mountain, and on a line before us saw the church of Zapolouta, the first village in Mexico. Here our apprehensions revived from want of a passport. Our great object was to reach Comitán, and there bide the brunt. Approaching the village, we avoided the road that led through the plaza, and leaving the luggage to get along as it could, hurried through the suburbs, startled some women and children, and before our entry was known at the cabildo we were beyond the village. We rode briskly for about a mile, and then stopped to breathe. An immense weight was removed from our minds, and we welcomed each other to Mexico. Coming in from the desolate frontier, it opened upon us like an old, long-settled, civilized, quiet, and well-governed country.

Four hours' ride over an arid and sandy plain brought us to Comitán. Santiago, being a deserter from the Mexican army, afraid of being caught, left us in the suburbs to return alone across the desert we had passed, and we rode into the plaza. In one of the largest houses fronting it lived an American. Part of the front was occupied as a shop, and behind the counter was a man whose face called up the memory of home. I asked him in English if his name was M'Kinney, and he answered "Sí, señor." I put several other questions in English, which he answered in Spanish. The sounds were familiar to him, yet it was some time before he could fully comprehend that he was listening to his native tongue; but when he did, and understood that I was a countryman, it awakened feelings to which he had long been a stranger, and he received us as one in whom absence had only strengthened the links that bound him to his country.

Dr. James M'Kinney, whose unpretending name is in Comitán transformed to the imposing one of Don Santiago Maquene, was a native of Westmoreland county, Virginia, and went out to Tobasco to pass a winter for the benefit of his health and the practice of his pro-

fession. Circumstances induced him to make a journey into the interior, and he established himself at Ciudad Real. At the time of the cholera in Central America he went to Quezaltenango, where he was employed by the government, and lived two years on intimate terms with the unfortunate General Guzman, whom he described as one of the most gentlemanly, amiable, intelligent, and best men in the country. He afterwards returned to Comitán, and married a lady of a once rich and powerful family, but stripped of a portion of its wealth by a revolution only two years before. In the division of what was left, the house on the plaza fell to his share; and disliking the practice of his profession, he abandoned it, and took to selling goods. Like every other stranger in the country, by reason of constant wars and revolutions, he had become nervous. He had none of this feeling when he first arrived, and at the time of the first revolution in Ciudad Real he stood in the plaza looking on, when two men were shot down by his side. Fortunately, he took them into a house to dress their wounds, and during this time the attacking party forced their way into the plaza, and cut down every man in it.

Up to this place we had travelled on the road to Mexico; here Pawling was to leave us, and go on to the capital; Palenque lay on our right, toward the coast of the Atlantic. The road Dr. M'Kinney described as more frightful than any we had yet travelled; and there were other difficulties. War was again in our way; and, while all the rest of Mexico was quiet, Tobasco and Yucatan, the two points in our journey, were in a state of revolution. This might not have disturbed us greatly but for another difficulty. It was necessary to present ourselves at Ciudad Real, three days' journey directly out of our road, to procure a passport, without which we could not travel in any part of the Mexican republic. And, serious as these things were, they merged in a third; *viz.* the government of Mexico had issued a peremptory order to prevent all strangers visiting the ruins of Palenque. Dr. M'Kinney told us of his own knowledge that three Belgians, sent out on a scientific expedition by the Belgian government, had gone to Ciudad Real expressly to ask permission to visit them, and had been refused. These communications damped somewhat the satisfaction of our arrival in Comitán.

By Dr. M'Kinney's advice we presented ourselves immediately to the commandant, who had a small garrison of about thirty men, well uniformed and equipped, and, compared with the soldiers of Central America, giving me a high opinion of the Mexican army. I showed him my passport, and a copy of the government paper of Guatemala, which fortunately stated that I intended going to Campeachy to embark

for the United States. With great courtesy he immediately undertook to relieve us from the necessity of presenting ourselves in person at Ciudad Real, and offered to send a courier to the governor for a passport. This was a great point, but still there would be detention; and by his advice we called upon the Prefeto, who received us with courtesy, regretted the necessity of embarrassing our movements, showed us a copy of the order of the government, which was imperative, and made no exceptions in favour of Special Confidential Agents. He was really anxious, however, to serve us, said he was willing to incur some responsibility, and would consult with the commandant. We left him with a warm appreciation of the civility and good feeling of the Mexican officials, and satisfied that, whatever might be the result, they were disposed to pay great respect to their neighbours of the North. The next morning the Prefeto sent back the passport, with a courteous message that they considered me in the same light as if I had come accredited to their own government, would be happy to render me every facility in their power, and that Mexico was open to me to travel which way I pleased. Thus one great difficulty was removed. I recommend all who wish to travel to get an appointment from Washington.

As to the revolutions, after having gone through the crash of a Central American, we were not to be put back by a Mexican. But the preventive order against visiting the ruins of Palenque was not so easily disposed of. If we made an application for permission, we felt sure of the good disposition of the local authorities; but if they had no discretion, were bound by imperative orders, and obliged to refuse, it would be uncourteous and improper to make the attempt. At the same time it was discouraging, in the teeth of Dr. M'Kinney's information, to undertake the journey without. To be obliged to retrace our steps, and make the long journey to the capital to ask permission, would be terrible; but we learned that the ruins were removed some distance from any habitation; we did not believe that, in the midst of a formidable revolution, the government had any spare soldiers to station there as a guard. From what we knew of other ruins, we had reason to believe that the place was entirely desolate; we might be on the ground before any one knew we were in the neighbourhood, and then make terms either to remain or evacuate, as the case might require; and it was worth the risk if we got one day's quiet possession. With this uncertain prospect we immediately commenced repairing and making preparations for our journey.

The comfort of finding ourselves at this distant place in the house of a countryman can hardly be appreciated. In dress, manner,

appearance, habits, and feelings, the doctor was as natural as if we had met him at home. The only difference was his language, which he could not speak connectedly, but interlarded it with Spanish expressions. He moved among the people, but he was not of them; and the only tie that bound him was a dark-eyed Spanish beauty, one of the few that I saw in that country for whom a man might forget kindred and home. He was anxious to leave the country, but trammelled by a promise made his mother-in-law not to do so during her life. He lived, however, in such constant anxiety, that he hoped she would release him.

Comitan, the frontier town of Chiapas, contains a population of about 10,000. It has a suburb church, and well-filled convent of Dominican Friars. It is a place of considerable trade, and has become so by the effect of bad laws; for, in consequence of the heavy duties on regular importations at the Mexican ports of entry, most of the European goods consumed in this region are smuggled in from Balize and Guatemala. The proceeds of confiscations and the perquisites of officers are such an important item of revenue that the officers are vigilant, and the day before we arrived twenty or thirty mule-loads that had been seized were brought into Comitan; but the profits are so large that smuggling is a regular business, the risk of seizure being considered one of the expenses of carrying it on. The markets, however, are but poorly supplied, as we found. We sent for a washerwoman, but there was no soap in the town. We wanted our mules shod, but there was only iron enough to shoe one. Buttons for pantaloons, in size, made up for other deficiencies. The want of soap was a deplorable circumstance. For several days we had indulged in the pleasing expectation of having our sheets washed. The reader may perhaps consider us fastidious, as it was only three weeks since we left Guatemala, but we had slept in wretched cabildoes, and on the ground, and they had become of a very doubtful colour. In time of trouble, however, commend me to the sympathy of a countryman. Don Santiago, alias Doctor M'Kinney, stood by us in our hour of need, provided us with soap, and our sheets were purified.

Pawling's difficulties were now over. I procured for him a separate passport, and he had before him a clear road to Mexico; but his interest had been awakened; he was loth to leave us, and after a long consultation and deliberation resolved that he would go with us to Palenque.