

A run of five miles brings us as far as we are allowed to travel by rail ; and Fortin concludes the luxurious cushions of a first-class car, and transfers us to the hard seats of a *diligencia*. Misfortin it might be phonographically called, for here exit ease and pleasure, enter peril and pain.

## V.

## ON THE STAGE.

Our Companions.—Vain Fear.—The Plunge.—Coffee Haciendas.—Peon Life.—Orizaba City.—The Mountain-lined Passway.—The Cumbres.—The Last Smile of Day and the Hot Lands.—Night and Useless Terror.—“Two-o’clock-in-the-morning Courage.”—Organ Cactus.—Sunrise.—The Volcano.—Into Puebla and the Cars.—The three Snow-peaks together.—Epizaco.—Pulqui.—“There is Mexico !”

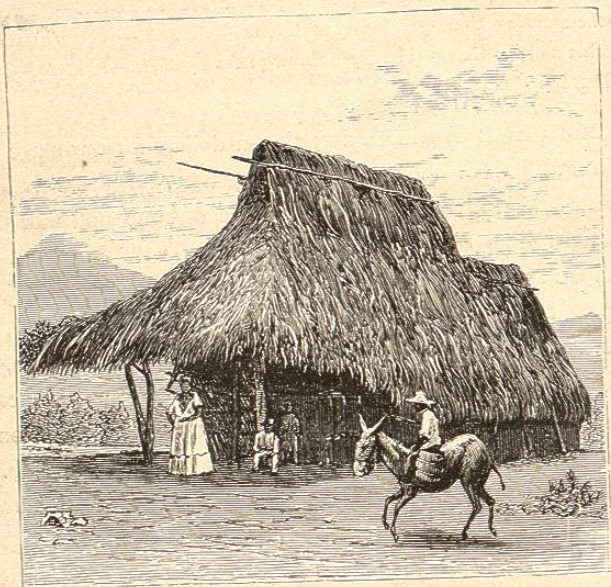
BEHOLD us at Fortin, paying eleven dollars for our stage fare to Puebla, and three more, lacking a quarter, for three valises of moderate weight ; eating a hasty plate of soup and nice cutlets, with fried slips of potatoes, washed down with Mexican coffee, which is usually first-rate ; not so here. “Stage is ready !” jabbars in Spanish a brown boy. All boys are brown here.

Our seats are taken in a Concord coach made in Mexico, a big, tough, lumbering, easy affair when the roads are easy ; when they are rough, it jolts and jumps as if the spirit of the paving-stones inspired it with their madness when they are whirled by a mob. But it is made to stand the jumping as well as the rocks that rock it, and tosses its human contents as unconcernedly as a juggler his balls. There are only five passengers, the first giving out of the dismal programme so faithfully served up to the affrighted appetite. These five men were the two Yankees, who, of course, had neither garlic nor tobacco about them, though one of them smoked all the time, but they were the best of cigars, and three Mexican gentlemen, on their travels to see the inauguration, one a son of a senator from Yucatan, and one an archæologist, and his friend, a light, German-looking gentleman, who had just been exploring the regions of Ixmail, which Stephens has so well described and illustrated. So the second terror disappears. The gentry chat freely



with the Spanish-speaking Yankee, and all goes merry as the presidential reception the night before.

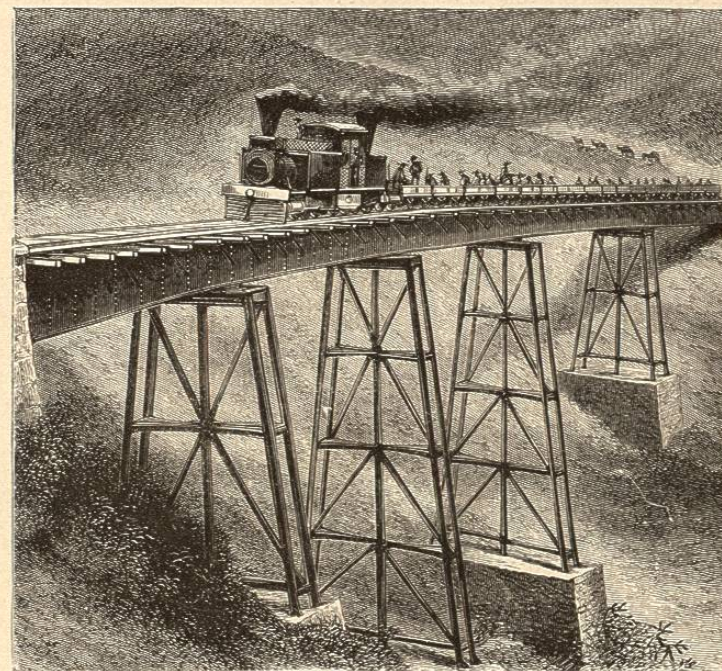
The road that was said to be so fearfully and wonderfully not made, is broad and smooth the first ten miles. It winds down a steep hill for two or three miles. The torrid January sun pours its heat fiercely on the coach. The driver and his boy are in their shirt-sleeves, and the passengers wish they were. The drivers have skin and hair-covered overpants for the coming Cumbres and midnight. Cottages line the roadside, half hidden amidst huge



A PEON'S HOUSE.

banana and coffee bushes, tall mango-trees, and flowers of every hue. The cottages are chiefly of cane, with sides not over four feet, and roofs rising ten to twenty feet, some even taller, giving them much coolness and airiness, the great desiderata. Brown women are busy at their household tasks, and brown children lie, like beetles, lazily in the shade or sun. The parrot screams and jabbars, and picks its handsome coat of its unhandsome parasites, poised on perches at times, but not always put in cages. Nature

is jammed full of life. Who dreams of the snow-fall of death that now covers all that north country, and makes the poor so poor, shivering over their scanty fires? Are these poor not the poorer? you will ask. I fear the answer will be in your favor. And yet that does not make one like the ice and snow and zero atmosphere any the more. Give these poor New England's religion, and they will be vastly her superior in climatic conditions.



GREAT BRIDGE OF MALTRATA.

We plunge down the steep road, a race of the horses' heels with the coach's wheels as to which shall touch bottom first. The heels touched bottom all the time, and of course reached the bottom of the hill ahead of the wheels, but only a length ahead. High along the side of this exceedingly steep hill creeps the railroad, making some of its most surprising feats of engineering as it



winds and leaps across this chasm. It becomes almost circular in its twists and turns.

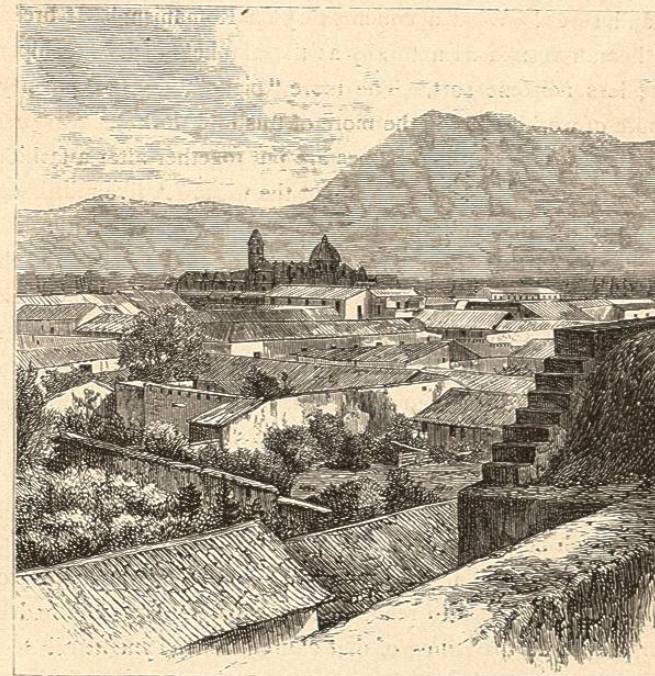
The coffee haciendas line the roadside. The bush is usually small, not over six or eight feet high, and spreading out like a barberry-bush. The berry is scattered over it, having a reddish tint, sometimes quite light. It is picked of this color, and ripened to its familiar brown by exposure on mats. You see it spread out in the door-yards, for this is its harvest-time. The sun is too hot for the coffee-tree, and so they plant bananas and other taller and thick-leaved trees among it to shade it from the direct rays. It wants heat, but not light.

The Mexican coffee is among the best in the world, the best Colima berry at the west coast selling as high as a dollar and a half a pound. It is prepared very strong, and then served up with two-thirds hot milk, if you are not acclimated. As you become so, the proportion of milk disappears, until it is well-nigh all coffee. But the coffee-house boys always bring two pots, one of coffee, one of hot milk, and pour at your pleasure. Here, too, one of Dr. Holmes's proofs of the millennium is satisfactorily settled:

"When what we pay for, that we drink,  
From juice of grape to coffee-bean."

The juice of grape is still here a fabulous beverage. Logwood is too plenty, and grapes too few. But the coffee *is* coffee. As Thurlow Weed says he always eats sausage serenely in Cincinnati, because there hog is cheaper than dog, so here coffee is more plentiful than chiccory or peas, and one can feel assured that he tastes the real article. It will become more and more an article of export, and replace the Rio berry, to which it is far superior in flavor and softness, even if it does not rival the Java and the Mocha. Among the beverages that will drive out the gross intoxicants, lager and whisky, is this pleasant Mexican coffee.

Orizaba has such an entrance as gave our critical companion a right to justify his charge against the road. The stones that once paved it lie knocked about on the surface. Deep holes abound.



VIEW OF ORIZABA.

and the stage reels to and fro among the stones and pits like a very drunken man, and the passengers follow its example. A half mile of such a tumble and we strike the pavement, which is not much better. The whipped-up mules fly over its boulders, and we jump up and down like a small boy on a high-trotting horse. The street is long—very long it seems to us—the houses of one story, and of no especial beauty that we could see in our unseemly dancing.

At last, "after much turmoil," we fly ferociously up to a long high wall, pierced with long high windows, well protected with long high bars, a single story, and striped prettily in fancy colors. At the big portal we stop, with a jounce worse than all that preceded, and beggars of every degree welcome us to the Hotel Diligencias of Orizaba. How they whine and grin and show off their horrid



rags and sores! What a commentary on Romanism! It breeds these human vermin as naturally as the blankets of its worshipers do the less noisome sort. The more "piety," the more poverty; the more of workless faith, the more of this idle work.

The pieces of our broken bodies are put together after a fashion, and we stretch our legs an hour about the town. A live mill keeps the town chattering, and gives it an unusual Mexican activity. But for that, only earthquakes, of which it has a goodly share, and the arrival of the stage-coach, would make it sensible of motion. The houses are all of one story, because of these earthquakes. A Southern gentleman told me that once, when here, a wave came, and he rushed into the court, and clung to a post for protection, while the ground rocked like a sea. He never was so frightened in his life. Well it may cause fear, for the still and solid earth is about all the basis most people have for faith or any thing else.

The church here has a picture on its façade of a priest stopping with his hands a pillar half fallen, and a motto, which was too far up for my dim eyes to read, that probably told how he had by prayer prevented the falling of that church. Mr. Tyndall will have to come down and correct these errors of faith, for as Pope, modified, says (one might prove thus that he also knew of the great volcano near),

"If Orizaba totter from on high,  
Shall gravitation cease if you go by?"

Why not? Here a church seems to have been upheld. If not churches, souls certainly have. The overfaith of Romanism is no worse than the underfaith of Tyndallism. Between the extremes lies the middle path of truth and safety.

A ravine goes through the town, luscious with tropical foliage and fruit. Above it hangs the chattering mill, which on its edge catches its water and busily makes native wheat into flour. It was the first factory I had seen in Mexico, and therefore doubly interesting. Twenty-five dollars for a barrel of flour should generate more grist-mills and wheat-fields, if protection is the true policy. The narrow lanes run through banana gardens to the open

fields, and grand black mountains rise close around, while the huge peak that gives the town its name towers, white and smiling in that golden midday, far above the clouds.



RIVER AT ORIZABA.

Orizaba is the favorite resort of the gentry of Mexico. Being on the railroad, it has outstripped its rivals, Jalapa and Cuernavaca, and bids fair to be the winter home of the big city. Some of the finest estates in the world are perched on its hills and hidden in its hollows. They enjoy the perpetual luxury of every tropical prod-



uct, with the pyramid of ice ever cooling the fancy, if not the air. It will be the favorite resort as well of wanderers from the United States of the North.

The cars here begin to really climb the Cumbres; four thousand feet they accomplish in less than thirty miles. It is holding on by the eyelids.

"The boldest held their breath  
For a time."

As they go, step by step, up the sides of these gorges, which "open their ponderous and marble jaws" to swallow up that smoking, puffing insect which crawls like a beetle, its rings each separate car, along the almost precipitous sides of the huge *barrancas*, a hand thrust out on one side would touch the mountain, on the other stretch out over thousands of feet of empty space between it and the rocks below. The road is the finest bit of engineering on this, if not on any, continent.

The stage-road twenty miles from Orizaba is the grandest I have ever traveled. It is smooth and pleasant of itself. The crazy Mexican ponies that it took so long to start are off, at last, with a leap and a whirl, and the one-storied, if not one-horse, town is left behind. The way is nearly straight, very level, and lined on each side, at the distance of a mile or two, with a succession of cliffs. They stand out of the valley as sharp as if lifted up in frame-work by human hands. Their origin is clearly volcanic. The sharp cut, the iron-like look, the wave shape, the striated lines, like the lava of Vesuvius, all prove their origin. They are two to four thousand feet high, I should say, on a passing glance. The valley between is rich in every fruit and flower and shrub. Here is a river gliding along, fringed with heavy willows, larger and compact-er of leaf than their temperate-zone brother, but of the same bending and hugging nature. No English river bank was ever more lovely in adornment, or more hidden from the passing eye. The hills are mostly rock, without the possibility of culture, but on some of them grasses and trees have sprung up, and goats and sheep find pasturage and shelter.

The pass is without parallel in any spot of Europe or America for its symmetry and grandeur. Interlachen has taller mountains, but not so perfect a valley. For a score of miles you never leave these mountain walls. Like the sphinx-lined pathway to Theban temples, they seem to guard the road to the distant capital. They end fittingly in true Spanish and Mexican grandeur, which is stately from beginning to end.

The Cumbres are their stopping-place. These, too, had been a part of the sup of horrors forced down the resisting will by those who would compel it to abandon its purpose.

We enter upon a still more romantic experience. The path winds up, back and forward, so frequently as almost to make it look from beneath like a series of parallel lines. This wall concludes the valley as completely as if it had been built by nature as a dam across its green river. There is a perfect pause. No way out of the valley in this direction but up this wall. It is not of rock, but of hard earth burned in this ceaseless sun, and supporting a little herbage and a few trees. They also conclude the *Tierras Calientes*, or Hot Lands, of the shore and its first wide terrace.

The valley itself terminates exquisitely. It lies, a basin of green, between the hills, a mile or two wide, the most of it under culture, and cut into tiny strips of varied tint, brown, green, golden, according to its products. A bit of a village, with a small, dingy white church, is on its southern edge. As we climb the steep face of the mountain this smiling *parterre* lies lovely below. It looks not unlike the meadows of Northampton from the top of Holyoke, only our height is twice or thrice as great, and its breadth is not a fourth as large. The setting sun looks lovingly on this bit of rescued nature among the black and bare hills, and as we wind our way up, every new ascent makes it look the lovelier, as it grows the more diminutive. It is a baby landscape, and all the more charming for its infantile littleness.

The sun goes down as we go up, and by the time the top is reached, the baby, in its cradle of lofty hills, has gone into shadow and approaching sleep. A light twinkles from a window far down