III.

TO GUANAJUATO.

A bad Beginning.—A level Sea.—Celaya.—A Cactus Tent.—Salamanca.—Irapuato.—Entrance to Guanajuato.—Gleaning Silver.—The Hide-and-go-seek City.—A Revelation.

I HAVE had two real panics since my arrival in this country, both short and severe. The first was the night of my reaching Mexico; the last, the night of my leaving Queretaro. Both were groundless; but so was Mr. Parrish's scare in North Salem, almost two hundred years ago, about witches, if he was scared at all, which is doubtful, there being good reasons for believing he was simply carried away by revenge in a church quarrel. That scare has given the enemies of Massachusetts a good stick to beat her with from that day to this, and faithfully has it been used.

My first scare was caused by the horrors on which I was fed from New York to the capital. I was told that I must go under a feigned name, or I would be poisoned, stilettoed, kidnaped, robbed. This is an anticlimax, but a true one to some souls, loss of money being to them the greatest loss. I found on my arrival at Mexico that one minister, not being well, thought that he was poisoned by the Jesuits, and was urged to have a private room and an American or English cook. I took a room in a hotel rented by a Jesuit priest, his father owning it, and went to bed. The room was very large, the bed very small. The farthing candle did not throw its beams very far, and only made darkness visible. Lonely, weary, heart-sick, homesick, I was in a good state for the panic to strike; and it struck. For some minutes I rolled in the trough of the sea of fear. All its waves and its billows went over me. "Then called I on the name of the Lord; oh Lord, I beseech thee, deliver

my soul." The work was His, not mine. The peril mine, the preservation His, and preservation far surpassed all peril. My favorite talisman, that had done excellent service often before, was again at hand, and I repeated,

"Jesus protects! My fears be gone!
What can the Rock of Ages move?
Safe in His arms I lay me down,
His everlasting arms of love."

I had no return of that panic in Mexico. Though out late and in out-of-the-way places, I took my possibly poisoned coffee as cheerfully as Socrates his really poisoned drink, and came and went indifferent to fear. Though in consciousness of peril, there was no panic, nor thought of panic.

It came upon me again at Queretaro, and as foolishly. I had been even more earnestly warned against making this tour. I had most unwisely allowed my letter of credit on the Diligencia company to be made out in my first name only, and my ticket to Matamoras likewise; and with a Spanish ending, Señor Gilberto, which, under the novel pronunciation of "Hilberto," was sufficiently concealing. This was done without my knowledge or consent by a too careful friend, but I allowed it to pass. It did not increase my courage. A disguise, however thin, makes the wearer weak.

At the head of the breakfast-table sat a fine-dressed gentleman, whose dulces and Champagne, freely proffered, made him autocrat thereof. I was told afterward that his style was above his known means of support, that he was watched by the police, and that he was suspected of being in league with robbers, giving them information of any rich placers his position, as a boarder in the stage-house, might enable him to detect. I was to go at three in the morning, alone. Possibly the tea and coffee helped it along, but it came—the panic. I went to bed for a couple of hours, knowing better than "Probabilities" knows the coming weather, that there was to be a storm. The soldiers woke me at two, with some delicious soft notes. I rarely, if ever, heard any thing more mellow. But I only thought of the poor captain shot the day before I left

Mexico, for insulting his colonel, and fancied this bird-like sweetness was a knell.

I took the coach, my sole companion opposite. Three armed men had accompanied me to Queretaro. One, perhaps unarmed, goes with me out of it. I had been trusting in those arms, though I pretended not to be relying upon them. I had repeated to a splendidly armed and trained shooter that I was sufficiently armed; for

"Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel just."

And when he was not satisfied with his favorite as an authority, I fell back on one higher and better, and said, with David: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." Now here I am, without the language, or a rifle, or a companion, alone on the high seas of travel. I am tempted sore for a little; then comes my talisman again:

"Jesus protects! My fears be gone!"

And they went. I laid down on the rocking seat and slept. I awaked with the sun. My sole fellow-traveler left me at the second posta, Apiaseo, a long adobe town.

I got out of my dignity and dust, and mounted behind the driver; no one is allowed to sit at his side. I exchanged verbal commodities, giving him English, of which I had plenty, for his Spanish, of which he had plenty. So we rode for a hundred miles; and the experience of riding alone and unarmed through the country was settled ere that morning sun grew hot. I forgot all about the gentleman who was to let his robber friends know that I was on the road—a conceit that only a panic could have created; for I was no fit game for their rifles. I felt as comfortable and secure with the driver and his unloaded rifle as with the best sharp-shooters of the country.

The country too, from Queretaro to Guanajuato, I had totally misapprehended. I had supposed, as the latter city was a mining town, the road to it must be far worse than any I had seen. I was condemning myself for my folly in going off my track home a hundred and fifty miles to see naught. It was as if one going to Albany from New York should have gone round by Springfield, except that this was all stage-riding, rough and tedious.

But duty called, and I obeyed. "*Per aspera ad astra*" I tried to make my motto, through hard places to the heavenly. But it turned out, as is so often the case when we fancy we have a big cross to take up, on taking it up, we find it no cross at all.

The road was smooth and level as oil. Only where it crossed a dry brook, or where the coachman took the paved centre instead of the soft sides, which he did occasionally, was there any approach to rockness. The day was splendid, cloudy, and coolish; the scenery was grand: a prairie a hundred miles long, and half that in width, with mountains ever inclosing the vision. The fields were almost all under cultivation. Irrigation gave them a green and gladsome look. The alfalfa, or lucern, was the greenest of the green. Wheat, barley, maize, and chilli were growing luxuriantly.

Celaya was our first large and pretty town, some forty miles from Queretaro. A landlord, very bland and child-like in his smile, told me the city had a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants. "Twelve thousand," I suggested. "No, señor; one hundred and twenty thousand." I wrote down the figures, "12,000;" he corrected them to "120,000." Somebody blundered; for the driver said there were not over eight thousand. Another traveler says there are twenty-five thousand. Perhaps he meant Leon, for which I was aiming.

The market-place was full of flowers. They sell large bouquets of roses, tulips, and other flowers for a tlaqua (three-fourths of a cent). This is the only Indian name used in the currency, and was the bottom cent, an eighth of a real, until the centavos appeared, a tenth of a dime, and the new baby displaced the old one. Still the old dies hard, and every thing is sold by the tlaqua, and not the centavo.

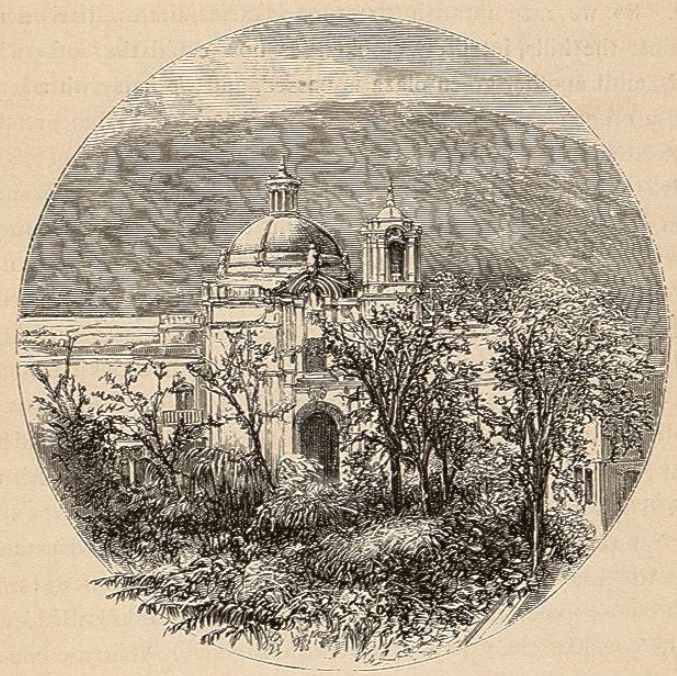
In the middle of the prairie, where we changed horses, a woman had made a tent of a cactus, and was busy rolling, patting, and frying her tortillas, putting upon them a small spoonful of beans and

a smaller spoonful of chilli, or pepper-sauce, folding them up for the driver and his *mozo*. This combination is not bad.

There were not unfrequently stands by the roadside under a cactus-bush, and sometimes dinners, and sometimes dwellers there. The two chief towns, Salamanca and Irapuato, are not far from Guanajuato. The first is pretty; the last, beautiful. I have seen none more so. It contains a population of twenty thousand. The houses are freshly and prettily washed; and it is lively withal. I sauntered through the plaza, talking and being talked to by beggars many. How lovely are these plazas, with all manner of lovely flowers! How unlovely their human weeds! How strange such beauty can be so beset! When shall our country villages see their greens and squares thus transformed? Will they then be equally deformed? I found this place had a local fame, and was the Northampton or Canandaigua on which a traveler might stumble, and fancy he had made a discovery, when lo! their beauties had long held a high place among their neighbors. So this city is a favorite the country round. It deserves to be. No preacher need be sorry if he is stationed at Irapuato. He will enjoy every minute of his triennium.

The road runs on, still smooth and velvety, amidst hollows and Peru-trees, and the mesquite. We pass the hacienda of asses (a large and popular one, of course), and come to the hills that evidently conclude the valley. Our prairie is gone. What you could not do in a day in Illinois, we have done in exactly that time. We turn to the mountains on our right hand. They encircle us close, coming round in front, having been for a hundred miles on both wings. There is no way, seemingly, through, or over, or into; and yet a city of fifty to sixty thousand inhabitants, the greatest silver town in the land, is right close to us, in among these bald, rocky bluffs. There must be a valley over there in which it lies embosomed. But where it can be, or how, are conundrums too hard for us. The plains are deserted, and we begin to wriggle in and out the spurs. We climb the hill slightly and softly, our good genius of the road still keeping off the stones. No valley the other

side; only a ravine. We enter it, pass a mud village, pass men spooning water with a jerk upon an inclined plane of stone, covered with whitish mud. This is the last washing of the silver mud, and done, like gleaning, by the workmen out of hours, as their own private speculation.



CHURCH OF SAN DIEGO, GUANAJUATO.

Stone walls twenty and thirty feet high, and with a castellated look, inclose these reduction works. The hills grow closer together, as if to resist invasion. But the driver defies the hills, and dashes on, winding round, crossing and recrossing a shallow brook with no sign of a city, except now and then a gleam from a church high up the mountain-side, which increased the deception; for the city was not there; clinging now to the brook, now to the precipice, now to both together, narrowing and narrowing, like an old lady the toe of the stocking she is knitting.

Swinging round one of these blank and profitless points after another, we suddenly strike a small but beautiful green garden, full of loungers. Another sharp turn, and we are in the busiest street I have seen in Mexico: one side set with seats all occupied, the other with shops, chiefly of drink, and all the street alive with people. So we race through street after street, narrow, backed up against the hills, intensely crooked (as how could they otherwise be?), until another green plaza is passed, and we halt with a jerk, and a crunch as of steam-brakes, in the heart of the hole, at the Hotel Concordia.

It is the most Yankee town in Mexico. Indeed, few in Yankeedom are as Yankee. Dover and Lynn do not turn out as many gazers at the passing trains as these sidewalks and windows do to the rattling coach. Lowell is as full of street loungers; Manchester, perhaps; but no other.

I found Americans here, and was at home, both in the place and the language, from the start, and rejoiced at so delightful an ending to my unusually bad beginning. The road of which I had heard nothing, and which I had supposed so rough, was smooth as a Red River prairie. The robbers changed to chatty drivers and market-women, and the end was as home-like as the Merrimac or the Alleghany. So may every dark still turn to brighter day!

IV.

A SILVER AND A SACRED TOWN.

Native Costume.—Reboza and Zarepe.—The Sombrero.—A Reduction Hacienda.—The Church in Guanajuato.—Its Antipodes.—A clerical Acquaintance.—A mulish Mule.—"No quiere."—The Landscape.—Lettuce.—Calzada.—The Town and Country.—Fish of the Fence.—The Cactus and the Ass.—Compensation.—One-story City.—High Mass and higher Idolatry.—The God Mary.

Dust off, and clothes changed, let us go out and look at the city. The streets are full of people. This is a festa day, the day of St. Joseph, and nobody is at work. The folks are out in their best array of *reboza* and *zarepe*. The reboza is the mantle of the ladies, and their weakness; the zarepe that of the gentlemen, and one of their weaknesses. For sexes, like every thing else here, go by the contraries to what they do elsewhere, and men are much more dressy than women. The reboza is always quiet in color, black, blue, and brown being the prevailing tints. It is a thin-wove, light cotton mantle, some three yards long and three-quarters wide, which is worn over the head and shoulders in an easy and graceful manner. It is the only adornment they possess, apart from the pleasant faces that beam from within it, and which are as good-looking, that is, look as good, as their whiter sisters here or elsewhere.

The men are more set forth. They essay the zarepe. I do not find this word in my lexicon, but suppose that is the way to spell it. This is a thick shawl of many colors, sometimes striped in red, yellow, green, blue, and white; sometimes with light centre and embroidered edges. They muffle up their face, and wrap their shoulders in this gay shawl even in the hottest days. It is their pride. Some of them cost two or three hundred dollars, and they rise, with