XII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Rancho de Villa de General Trevina.—A Sign of Home.—A misty Escort.—Blistering Morin.—Chaparral.—The changed Face of Nature.—The Yankee Hat and Hut.—Mesas, or Table-lands.—The bottom Rancho: Garcia.—Mier.—Comargo.—The Grand River unseen, yet ever near.—Last Night in a Rancho.—La Antigua Renosa.

A RIDE since three o'clock this morning is an excuse for sleeping at near the midnight hour, especially as two will find me up again. But the sight of a petroleum lamp is such a novelty that one can not help being kept awake a little season. I have not seen one on a hotel table before since I left the States. It is like the land-birds Columbus saw, harbingers of home. Not twenty leagues off is the Rio Grande. To-morrow's breakfast, if all goes as well as it has gone, will be eaten on its banks. This rancho has, therefore, a value above itself; as a guide-post near your native village, when returning thither, is far more than cross-beams and common letters. It glows with a glory and a beauty not its own. I am getting to like ranchos. This Rancho de Villa de General Trevina, despite its big name, is very cordial. The dinner is good, service amiable, tea *fuerte*, and the bed lies provokingly near, in nice white sheets, too nice and white for this dust-covered form, saying, "Come and rest."

The day broke on me well out of the gardens and grandeurs of Monterey. Three hours I slept, while the sick mules ran out of that paradise, and regained outwardly and inwardly Paradise lost. A thick mist hung around the few low hills, reminiscences of the tall Sierra Madre. The mist was sticky and ocean-like, and I fancied it had come up from the Gulf to escort me thither. It would

have badly spoiled the roads had it done so, for the rain and the soil make a black and pitchy mixture which is well-nigh untraversable. I greeted it as an old friend, despite the fear that it might stick a good deal closer than we desire the best of old friends, all the time, to do. But the sun got the mastery of it, and of every thing else, and blazed away without let or hinderance. At the end of eleven leagues we made the town of Morin, a white and blistering place, its sun-dried adobe still reproducing the sun too dazzlingly. No trees, no shaded walks, no pleasant fruit and farm-trading plaza—only a white heat. A cup of coldish water was its only relief.

One hardly expected to find even so agreeable a town; for an almost perfect desolation preceded it for many miles. The chaparral everywhere abounded, tall and briery. A clearing or two showed that the land was fertile, and only wanted inclosing and clearing up to be very fruitful. Cattle and horses and sheep were wandering among the chaparral, finding good herbage. The land did not look like Mexico. It was not high, hilly, or dry. It was moist, bushy, wild, and naturally and easily productive.

Nor did the people look like Mexicans. They had the Yankee hat and look, head-gear and complexion, every thing but the Yankee log-hut; but their ranchos are as bad, so the equality of resemblance continues.

From Morin you begin to get a view of the general lay of the land. Leaving out that low sierra in front of us, which we shall soon circumvent and omit from the scene, you note, as the characteristic, that it slides off in successive terraces, miles wide. It began at Monterey, eight hundred feet above the Gulf. It declines gradually to the sea-level. Probably half of it is made at this place.

The *mesas*, or tables, as these landspreads are called, are broad and level, and from them you see a lower but not low valley, wider than themselves, spreading out for scores of miles, until its green is lost in the blue of the sky. As you descend easily and by very short falls into this lower valley, you find that it is not a complete

level, but a succession of slight fallings off. So you dip down, little by little, to the sea. A half-dozen leagues from Morin, we go through a dismal rancho with a grand name, which I have forgotten. All these ranchos have grand names, and nothing else. Its wells are numerous, and have a stone curb and two stone pillars that support the beam that holds the rope that lifts the pail.

This hill we run down amidst chaparral of very fine greenness, but of no present value. Our halt for breakfast is at the rancho Garcia, the bottom of our experiences. Our meal is served under a thatched roof with bamboo sides, with the tortillas frying, and the smoke ascending and descending, especially the latter. The girls are dirtier, if possible, than the food. It seemed impossible to taste their filthy dishes. But hunger, like necessity, knows no law; and a little nibbling carries us on till night-fall.

The trees stand grand about the smoky hut, and the natives lounge under the grandest one. As a dessert, I get up a broken talk with them, and so overcome the cry of hunger within. The still better cry of "*Vaminos*" calls me gladly away from the tree and rancho. The road pursues the same path through an open, empty, thorn-covered country, rich for every manner of fruit, when it can have rest and an intelligent population. Night finds us in a town of huts, whose name I have lost. It was called, as most are hereabouts, for some general of a revolution, and will probably be changed after the next pronunciamento for his name who shall then make a successful revolt of a moment. But the narrow room is cleanly; its hard earthen floor is smooth and swept, and after Garcia its meal is metropolitan.

We are up and off at three, through the same dull landscape, hardly varied now with glimpse of hill, green, flowery, capable, and empty. We are pulling straight for the river; when we reach it we shall turn Gulfward. Open and settled spaces reveal themselves as we get near the American line, and our breakfast is served at noon in the quite bustling Mier. A Frenchman from Paris, *via* New York, gets up a goodly meal of mixed American and Parisian sort. The school is just out, and boys are lounging, in

true Yankee fashion, about the coach. The town is half Mexican, half American. Open fields and open windows show the Northerner is here. Adobe houses and blank walls and big coach doors show the Mexican is here also. England and Spain meet and mingle on the outskirts of either realm.

A pull till four, through like expressionless country, brings us to Comargo, the Rio Bravo, and the end of Mexico, though thirty-six hours still remain between being on the one bank and on the other of the Grand and Brave river. This border town is the cleanest and dullest of all between Monterey and Matamoras. An inlet of the Rio Grande, quite a stream, puts up behind the town, and is crossed by a tedious ferriage. The steep bank is pulled up, and the broad plaza stretches out, a third of a mile almost. At its upper end are Government buildings, spacious, pretty, and cool. At its lower end is a covered market, an unseen sight farther inland, swept, garnished, and empty. A few stores inclose the square on its two sides parallel with the two rivers. Here I get my last packet of silver, and the coach proceeds in the gathering sunset hours adown the banks of the river. Its waters are not seen, but I know they are only a mile or so away, and that that Northern sky is over the land of my fathers and my faith.

The trees grow large, the fields are open and cultivated. Every thing is American and fascinating. No matter how much we may admire foreign sights, home sights are ever the tenderer and lovelier. Brilliant Mexico, with its magnificent volcanoes, barrancas, and haciendas; its wonderful flowering and fruit; its orange orchards and banana groves and maguey prairies; its ancient piles and its modern — all are forgotten in the familiar landscape of this semi-northern river. It is near midnight ere we reach our last rancho for the night, La Antigua Renosa.

The rancho is, like its creator man, susceptible of progress. These three nights have demonstrated this. Each good as compared with fears and with maledictions, the present and last is the best. A dozen new chairs of Yankee make, hard-bottomed, brown-painted, are arranged around the room, as if they were expecting a prayer-

meeting, or a log-cabin preaching. The table has nice white ware, also of the latest Yankee pattern; the Yankee candle stands in its shining brass candlestick in a plate in the centre. Surely here is no *antiqua* Renosa, but one most modern. But even this word is modernized, for the name they gave me was, Los Renos a Viejo, or some such affair; Viejo is too old-fashioned a word, and so gives place to La Antigua—"old" to "ancient."

The dinner, at eleven o'clock at night, is being got ready. Not old that; they never prepare that till the passengers come. The coaches from Matamoras have just arrived, and quite a crowd criss-cross at this out-of-the-way corner. Longfellow's "Wayside Inn" could much more properly have been written of this spot than of Sudbury, where such characters as his could no more have been weather-bound than born.

A good meal follows, and a good sleep, though all too short; for at four we are off, half asleep still.

XIII.

JOLTINGS AND JOTTINGS.

A Creator and an Imitator.—Church-making and Carriage-writing.—The oldest Church and the youngest.—*Compagnons du Voyage.*—A Brandy-sucker.—Prohibition for Mexico.—Talks with the Coachman and Mozo.—Hides and Shoes.—San Antonio.—Its Casa and Inmates.—Rancho Beauties.—Women's Rights in Mexico.—Sermonizing in the Wilderness.—A Night on Stage-top.—Fantastic Forms.—Spiritual Phantasms.—Light in a dark Place.—Matamoras and Brownsville.

"JOHN WESLEY created a Church," said an ambitious minister not long since; "why may not I?" One effort to imitate that example would have satisfied the aspirant. Many have tried it before and since, but few with such results: Mr. Weinbrenner, Mr. Shinn, Mr. Capers, Mr. Scott, Mr. Campbell; but they did not make such a big thing of it after all. I heard a good story in Mexico of Mr. Campbell and his church. The late Roman Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore was talking with an earnest female Campbellite cousin of his. Said he, "If I was not a Roman Catholic, I would be a Campbellite." "Why so?" asks the lady, delighted at this half a loaf. "Because," he answers, "if I did not belong to the oldest Church, I would to the youngest."

Now, if I can not imitate John Wesley in creating a Church, I can try to copy his example in a hardly less remarkable gift, writing in a coach. If this is so very difficult, as the compositors would affirm could they but see the sheets on which this is penciled, how much more difficult must it have been for his ecclesiastical composition. True, I have not his smooth roads and table fitted to the carriage, but I have a road almost as good, and a slow and easy-going coach. The last day in Mexico I may well be treated to this luxury. I am nearing Matamoras, having been for twenty days,