

SECTION IV.

PREPARATIONS FOR TRAVELLING IN MEXICO.—

JOURNEY TO THE MINING DISTRICTS OF TLAL-
PUJAHUA.

So little was known in the city of Mexico of the manner in which the affairs of the great English Mining Companies were conducted, and such contradictory reports prevailed with regard to the system pursued by them, that I determined to seek, by personal observation, that information which I found it impossible to draw from any other source. In this I was influenced not merely by the interest that I naturally felt in the issue of enterprises, in which British capital to so large an amount was invested; but by a wish not to render myself responsible, in the reports which I might be called upon to transmit to His Majesty's Government, upon the subject, for any errors but my own.

In the Capital, the opinions of most people seemed to be influenced by feelings of merely a personal

nature. There were so many prepossessions in favour of particular districts, so many prejudices against others, and such rivalities amongst the agents or friends of the different Companies, that I found it hopeless to attempt to arrive at any reasonable conclusion with regard to their prospects while at a distance from the scene of action; and, under this impression, I resolved, in any of those inaccuracies into which the want of data might betray me, to ensure to myself the satisfaction of knowing that I had, at least, done all that in me lay to avoid them.

In preparing for the execution of a plan, which rendered it necessary for me to undertake a series of journeys amounting in their aggregate to nearly three thousand English miles, I endeavoured to lessen, as much as possible, the inconveniences with which travelling in Mexico is attended, by taking beforehand all those little precautions, the neglect of which in the first instance is sure to occasion so much subsequent vexation and delay. I accordingly procured the very best horses that were to be obtained, both for myself and my servants, and took equal care in the selection of my baggage, or carga mules, upon which, in fact, the whole comfort of a journey depends.

A Mexican inn, or even a second-rate Hacienda, contains little or nothing besides the bare walls. If the traveller be very much fatigued, he may stretch himself at full length upon the floor, or perhaps he may obtain the luxury of a table, which, as present-

ing a less uneven surface, forms a better substitute for a couch. To any thing beyond this he must not aspire, nor must he expect to find, except in the towns, any other provisions than tortillas and Chile. He therefore depends, both for rest and food, upon his own supplies, and of these he ought never to lose sight. In order to accomplish this, the *carga* mules should be of the best Durango breed, light and active, and able to continue at a trot before the horses thirty or forty miles, with a load of 150 or 160lbs. The Mexicans attach this load to the animal in a most slovenly manner, by merely balancing the packages upon a pad, composed of skins, and sackcloth stuffed with straw, and then girding them with such violence as frequently to injure the mule, by creating swellings either under the girths, or upon the withers, on which the whole load rests in going down hill. The packages too, require constant attention, and alteration, as the balance is destroyed by the roughness of the motion when travelling at a quick pace, although at a very slow walk, fewer changes are necessary. I found that so much inconvenience arose from the frequency of these stoppages on my way to Cuautla, that I determined on my return home to introduce an innovation, against which all my Mexican servants protested, until they were taught by experience how much it tended to diminish their own trouble. I employed a French saddler recently established in the capital to make me four English packsaddles,

upon the model of one which had gone through the Peninsular war, each furnished with a tree, so as to prevent the load from resting immediately upon the mule's back, and these again provided with iron hooks on each side, to which a portmanteau or bed is attached by corresponding rings and straps. In the rainy season, an oilskin cover, or tarpaulin, is thrown over the whole, and secured by a broad leather girth; this serves to keep the load steady, while breechings and a breast-piece prevent the pack-saddle itself from slipping, even in the most precipitous roads. One of the trees was fitted up in a different manner from the rest, being provided with iron brackets, made to fit a canteen, which was slipped in between them, and secured by a single strap. From the moment that I adopted this system, I discarded all the clumsy Mexican "*aparejos*," and I had the satisfaction both of never having a mule afterwards with a sore back, and of seeing them perform their journeys with ease and convenience. My luggage generally consisted of a canteen, which contained cooking utensils, as well as a small breakfast and dinner set for four people, and formed a light load for one mule: one of Thompson's small brass camp beds, with a portmanteau to balance it, was allotted to a second mule: the third carried two boxes for wine, provisions, and other necessaries, of which we laid in a stock in the larger towns; and the fourth the beds of Dr. Wilson and Mr. Carrington, a young friend by whom I was

generally accompanied. A single muleteer, duly provided with his sabre and lasso, took charge of this detachment, which preceded the rest of the party; and in addition to him we were usually accompanied by three men servants, two Mexicans and an English groom, who, being all armed as well as ourselves, with pistols and sabres, besides two or three double-barrelled fowling-pieces, formed a party sufficiently strong to secure us against any danger of an attack from robbers. When once trained to European wants, I know no better travelling servants in the world than the Mexicans. They are a fine manly race, excellent horsemen, adepts in the use of that indispensable instrument the lasso, and capable of enduring every sort of fatigue. They eat any thing, always look respectably, if provided, as mine were, with the leather (Payo) dress of the country, and sleep upon the ground, wrapped in the manga, which each man carries behind his saddle, round your bed if you bivouac, or stretched across your room door at the Ventas, where, as every thing is open, you have seldom any other security than what the presence of your own attendants may give. In mine I used to feel the most perfect confidence, for, when treated well, I have found them capable of great attachment, and although I had not occasion to put them to any severe trial, I am convinced that in an emergency they would not have deserted me.

I know few sensations more pleasing in life than those which I have experienced when starting, thus

accompanied, upon one of my long expeditions, with all my party well mounted, a few spare mules and horses driven before us, and the certainty of finding, after traversing a new country, in the principal object of the journey, enough to gratify curiosity, and often to remove unpleasant doubts. There is something so wild and independent in the whole thing, that there are few people, who have stamina enough to support the fatigue, that do not learn to enjoy it. You forget Europe and all the mingled advantages and restraints of civilization, and trusting to your horse for carrying you to the place of your destination, and often to your gun for a meal upon the way, you care neither for mountains nor rivers, but take at once the shortest and the most picturesque road, or branch off to the east or the west, at pleasure, should there be any thing, on either side, to attract attention. The Mexican horses are admirably adapted to this sort of travelling. They are small, but active, and full of spirit; extremely light in hand, and ready to spring off at full speed upon the slightest motion of the rider. Many of them possess in addition to these good qualities that most invaluable requisite for the road, a passo, of the advantages of which no one, who has not tried it, can form an idea. The passo consists in a peculiar motion of the horse, by which the hind legs are drawn along the ground, sustaining nearly the whole weight of the body, while the fore are raised in high and graceful action; the rider, from the gentle movement

of the hind quarter, is hardly moved in his seat, while the horse before appears to be going at a trot, and does in fact move at nearly the same rate. A good passo horse will perform, with ease to himself, six miles in the hour, and will hold this pace over good ground for several successive leagues. I had one, known in Mexico by the name of the Mascarillo, (from a peculiar white mark on one side of the head) whose passo was so rapid as to keep any other horse nearly at a gallop: when at his full speed he was thought to move at the rate of ten or eleven miles in the hour, but this was an exertion which he could not sustain for any length of time. A more ordinary passo varies from four to six miles in the hour, seldom exceeding the one, or falling much short of the other. I never had above two of the first kind, one of which was a little brown horse which Mrs. Ward used to ride, the other a favourite of my own, a Rosillo, (or Roan) very fast, and with legs like a deer, but with such courage that he performed all my journeys with less injury to himself than others apparently of three times his strength. Dr. Wilson had a third of clumsier make, but an equally good passo, and it was curious to see with what ease these three creatures went over the ground, while all the rest of the horses were wearied out with their efforts to keep up with them. Passo horses of this description are valuable, and will sell, in any part of the country, for one hundred and fifty or two hundred dollars, (30% or 40%) while a trötön, or trotting horse

of the very best kind, may be bought for fifty dollars, (10%) and might have been purchased for half the money in 1823, before the influx of English raised the prices, as it always does. Many people prefer mules to horses for a long journey, and, in a very mountainous country, they certainly answer best: they are useful, too, for servants; but for my own riding I should never employ them, for it was my delight to stop, wherever there was game in the vicinity of the road, and, after shooting for half an hour, to rejoin my party at a canter, which would spoil a passo mule, although it does no sort of harm to a horse. When kept at their regular pace, however, mules are most extraordinary animals, and seem capable of continuing at the rate of thirty miles a day, from January to December, without fatigue or inconvenience. I had one little chesnut macho, that had been with Mr. Hervey to the Interior, and afterwards both with him and Mr. Morier to the coast. It was then transferred to Mr. Baring, with whom it went to Tépïc, from whence it returned just in time for me to repurchase it at the commencement of my own travels. In all these it carried my muleteer, a very heavy man; and when, in April 1827, I transferred the two together to Mr. Stokes, to go over no inconsiderable portion of the same ground again, there was as little in the mule, as in the rider, to indicate the fatigues which it had undergone. I may say the same of a little black terrier, one of the two only dogs that survived the

journey from the coast. Four greyhounds and another terrier died mad upon the sands, within a league of Veracruz; but this little creature being younger, suffered less from the sun; and, from the moment that we reached the Table-land, formed, at once, an attachment to the mules, which continued unchanged during the whole of my stay. In defiance of heat and dust, the dog always accompanied the leading mule; at night he slept amongst the packsaddles, where his vigilance was of great use; and except to be fed, nothing ever induced him to enter a house. He still, I believe, continues the same career, as I thought it a pity, on my departure, to separate him from his friends, with whom he has since been to Catorce and Tépantlán.

I shall finish this general outline of travelling in Mexico, by saying that in the hot months of May, July, and August, in the course of which, from the extreme dryness of the season in 1826, I was enabled to visit Tlālpūjāhūa, Tēmāscāltēpēc, Real del Monte and Zimāpān, we used to set off long before day-break in the morning; so that we usually got our day's journey over by twelve or one o'clock. In Mexico, you never stop upon the road to bait, but perform the whole distance, whatever it may be, without a halt. It is better for the horses and mules, as they have a longer time together for rest and food, which, in so hot a climate, they do not enjoy without water, and this cannot be given them, in any quantity, until the day's work is done. Nor

is there any thing in the arrangement inconvenient for the traveller, as it gives him time to dress and bathe before dinner, and afterwards to stroll about in the cool of the evening, where there is any thing to be seen, until the approach of darkness summons him to bed. It is then that the luxuries of mosquito curtains and portable bedsteads are really felt, particularly if the length of the legs is calculated, (as it always should be) so as just to raise you beyond the maximum of a flea's leap. Sheltered from all annoyances of this kind, and extended in peace and comfort upon your elastic stretcher, you soon forget the fatigues of the past day, and are awakened at three the next morning, by your muleteers, ready to face those of the day to come. It always required an hour's work to saddle, and load the mules, make up the beds, and prepare a little stock of cold provisions, which we stopped to eat, at eight or nine o'clock, wherever water or Pulque was to be procured. If we got in extremely early, we had usually some books with us to pass the time, and for those who were not thus disposed, the kitchen, or the care of the animals, afforded occupation, as, in both, constant superintendence was necessary. On the whole, I found my journeys a most agreeable relaxation, after the confinement of the Capital. I ended them with regret; I look back to them with pleasure, and I should recommence them again to-morrow, with great satisfaction, were my profession to lead me again to a country as little known as Mexico, and

offering as much to excite attention, and recompense curiosity.

The first Mining district that I visited, after my return from Cuautla, was that of Tlālpūjāhuā, which is situated upon the confines of the State of Valladolid, about 38 leagues, or 95 English miles, from the Capital. The road traverses the mountains that bound the Valley of Mexico to the West, and passes through Tācūbāyā and Sāntā Fē to Lās Crūcēs, where the battle between the Insurgents, under Hidalgo, and the Viceregal troops, commanded by Truxillo, was fought in 1810. From this high ridge, (it is 10,882 feet above the level of the sea,) where a number of crosses and piles of stones still mark out the burying-places of the Indians who fell in the action, the descent towards the valley of Toluca commences, which is 785 feet more elevated than that of Mexico. The town of Lerma lies about a league from the foot of the mountains, upon the borders of the lake, from which the Rio Grande de Santiago takes its rise. This river assumes a different name, at first, in almost every village near which it passes, but is the same which, after fertilizing the Bāxīō, and traversing the extremity of the Lake of Chāpālā, runs through a large portion of the State of Guādālājārā, and finally discharges itself at San Blas into the Pacific. It contains a very considerable body of water, and is not fordable, even during the dry season, within a very few miles from its source.

Lerma possesses nothing remarkable as a town, except an inn, where, from the frequent visits of foreigners, both beds and provisions may be obtained, and where some attention to cleanliness is shown.

The place contains about 4000 inhabitants, and is surrounded by Maguey plantations, which produce most excellent Pulque. The distance from the Capital is twelve leagues.

From Lerma there are two roads to Tlālpūjāhuā; one of which passes through the city of Tōlūcā, while the other, which is four leagues shorter, branches off to the North-west, and runs in a direct line to the town of Īstlāhūacā, (about twelve leagues from Lerma, and fourteen from Tlalpujahuā,) where we slept. For nearly eight leagues we followed a bridle road called El camino de las Cajones, through a country covered with Haciendas of corn, or maize, and large grazing estates, over which immense herds of cattle are scattered. The plain is intersected with canals for irrigation, while the view, which is diversified by a number of villages rising in the distance, and bounded by the Nevada, or Snowy mountains, of Toluca to the extreme South, conveys an impression of fertility and abundance that is very pleasing. For about four leagues before we reached Īstlāhūacā, we travelled over an elevated and barren ridge; but cultivation re-appears in the vicinity of the town, (which stands on a little elevation upon the banks of the river Lerma,) and