

SECTION II.

ROAD FROM GUANAJUATO TO SAN LUIS POTOSI.

—HACIENDA DEL JARAL.—STATE OF SAN LUIS.—ROAD TO CATORCE, AND MINES OF THAT DISTRICT.

WE took leave of Guanajuato and its hospitable inhabitants on the 20th of November, and continued our journey towards San Luis Pötösī, which both Mr. Martin and myself were desirous to visit, on account of its growing importance as a commercial town. We were likewise anxious to see the celebrated mining District of Catorce, which is very little known in Mexico; and notwithstanding the assurances of the natives, that it would be impossible for us, with children and a lady of the party, to attempt to cross the country between Catorce and Durango, where we should find neither houses, nor accommodations of any kind, we were not without hopes of discovering some direct road to the North that would exempt us from that worst of all evils—

the necessity of passing twice over the same line of desolate and monotonous country. This we must have done, had we proceeded from Guanajuato to Durango by the usual route through Zácātēcās and Sōmbrērētē, by which alone we could hope to reach Aguas Calientes on our return, where it was our intention to branch off towards Guadalajara and Valladolid. The appearance of the map was not indeed encouraging, for there is not a single Rancho laid down in the whole tract of country that we were about to traverse; but Mrs. Ward having resolved rather to take her chance of bivouacs, and a little starvation, than to be left behind until we could meet her again at Aguas Calientes, we determined to take our own line, and to trust to Providence to carry us through. Our horses and mules were quite refreshed by a week's rest, and, with the exception of my little girl, who was still far from strong, we were all in admirable travelling condition ourselves; so that we looked forward almost with pleasure to the difficulties which we were about to encounter.

We left Guanajuato by the gate of Marfil, and proceeded to Silao, a "Pueblo Ranchero," surrounded with maize fields, about four and a half leagues off, and from thence to the Hacienda de Chichimiquillās, situated in a barranca full of Aguacates, fig-trees, oranges, and magnificent Palma Christi. The climate was almost "templado," for the road from Silao, which is itself 1,389 feet lower than

Mexico, is a gradual slope, and the Hacienda is protected by surrounding hills. The country about is beautifully cultivated, and on the plains around I shot a number of hares, and several wood-pigeons of a very large and delicate kind.

It was our intention to have proceeded on the first day to La Tlächiquērā, another Hacienda, stated to be half-way between Guānjūatō and San Fēlipē, in the centre of a ridge of mountains, which can only be avoided by taking a circuitous route through Leon. Most fortunately, on making inquiries at Chīchīmīquillās, we found so great a difference of opinion amongst the natives respecting the distance, some calling it five, and others fifteen leagues, that we resolved not to attempt the passage of the Sierra without being sure of having daylight enough before us to accomplish it. On the 21st we set out at a very early hour, and, after winding for near two leagues up the bed of a river, full of deep sand and rocks, we plunged at once into the heart of the mountains, where our guide soon grew bewildered, and at mid-day confessed that he no longer knew where he was. Having ascertained, as well as we could, the direction in which the Tlachiquera ought to lie, we toiled on for nine long hours, sometimes ascending places where the united exertions of all our men and mules could hardly make the coach advance half a mile in an hour; at others, opening a passage with our swords through the cactuses and thorny bushes which obstructed the way; and, on

one occasion, traversing a slope so exceedingly precipitous, that three lassos passed through the carriage, and over the roof, with all the strain upon them, on the upper side, that men and horses could apply, were hardly able to keep the carriage upon its wheels, or to prevent it from descending into the valley below. This is the real advantage of the lasso. As an ordinary mode of drawing, it can only be used in a country like the Pampas, where you traverse a plain of some hundreds of miles in extent; but it may always be applied on an emergency, where the saddle is provided with a ring, or a pommel suited to the purpose, and it is then of the most essential service. Wherever we came to a pass too steep for our jaded mules to face, we attached lassos to different parts of the carriage, and, as no horse refuses to draw in this manner, by the united exertions of the party, the obstacle was soon overcome. We were nearly exhausted, however, with such continued efforts, and still more by the want of water, when Hilario, who had been detached to take a view of the country from the highest ridge in sight, brought us the joyful intelligence that he had discovered the Hacienda, from which we were not more than two leagues distant. Notwithstanding this favourable report, we did not reach it till long after dusk, having been twelve long hours upon the road, without seeing a house or a human being. Our difficulties were much increased by the impossibility of catching any of our fresh mules to supply

the place of those who began the day in the coach ; for the country was so covered with Nopales and loose stones, that it was impossible for the hardest lassoer of the party to put his horse into a gallop, without imminent risk both to the animal and to himself. In general we stopped to change at some "corral," or enclosure, into which the loose mules and horses are driven ; but on the road to the Tlachiquera such an accommodation was desired in vain. To compensate this we had the assistance of the bull-dog, whom I have mentioned as the guardian of the coach upon the road. The natural ferocity of this beast had long lain dormant, but it was roused by the cries of the servants, and joining them in their pursuit of the mules, he fastened upon one of the animals by the nose, and in an instant pinned it to the ground ; nor was it without great difficulty that he was compelled to relinquish his hold. From this moment he assumed quite a new character, and attacked in so wanton a manner pigs, and every other creature that came in his way, that I was almost glad to lose him, as we did shortly afterwards, on entering San Luis Pötösi.

Our accommodations at the Tlachiquera were exceedingly bad, for there was nothing but the size of the walls to denote the former importance of the estate, which was totally ruined during the Revolution. The Rancho del Vénäditö, from which the Viceroy Äpödäcä took his title, in consequence of the capture of Mina, is in the vicinity of La Tlächí-

qüerä ; and the whole Sierra was constantly overrun by parties of Insurgents or Royalists. There is a fine presa (reservoir) of water, however, immediately below the house, and provisions were abundant ; but Mrs. Ward was lodged in a barn, where she was considerably annoyed on the following morning by a mule, that forced its way in through the shattered door, just as she was beginning her toilet, notwithstanding her vehement entreaties that no one would come in. The rest of the party were crowded into one small sala, where we supped first, and then put up our beds, there not being room for them and the table at the same time.

Nov. 22. We reached Sän Fēlipē, a town formerly of some importance, but now in ruins, many of the houses being unroofed, while the Adobe walls, deprived of their usual coating of white, present a most desolate appearance. The first four leagues of the road from La Tlächíqüerä were steep and mountainous, but after crossing a ravine, at a Rancho called El Passo de los Arrästres, we entered the elevated plains of San Felipe, and continued to traverse them without interruption for the space of six or seven leagues. I never saw any thing so extraordinary as the number of hares in every part of this plain. I shot two or three after breakfast in some bushes by the side of the road, and gave them to one of the servants to hang to the pommel of his saddle ; his horse, frightened with the unusual load, ran away, and I believe, that without exaggeration, I may say, that

before he had gone a quarter of a mile, he was driving fifty hares before him. They put one another up, and formed altogether a most curious assemblage, as they scoured along before my startled man, and his still more startled steed.* Three leagues from the Passo de los Arrastres, there is a large Hacienda called San Juan de los Llānos, in a very dilapidated state, but with an abundant supply of water. The "presa" was covered with ducks, some of which I shot, and they formed, with the hares, a very comfortable addition to the slender fare that San Felipe afforded us; where the venta was tolerably clean, and airtight, but meat was not to be obtained, except at market-hours.

Nov. 23. From San Felipe to El Jārāl, ten leagues.

About two leagues from San Felipe, there is a ramification of the Sierra Madre to cross, with a long descent, or mal passo, called El puerto de San Bärtölö, very inconvenient for carriages, but not absolutely dangerous; at least, we did not think so after La Tlachiquera. The ascent and descent occupy about three leagues. We breakfasted at the pueblo de San Bärtölö, from whence to the Jārāl we passed through a succession of vast potreros, well walled in, and interspersed with fields of Indian corn.

The Hacienda is seen from a considerable distance

* The servant was an Englishman, and was riding with a snaffle bridle. I never saw a horse succeed yet in running away with a Mexican upon him, or with a Mexican bit.

in the centre of a fine valley, about twelve leagues in circumference, the whole of which belongs to the Marques del Jārāl, the most opulent landed proprietor of Mexico, and one of the most *extensive* landholders in the world. Besides the estate of the Jārāl, he possesses several large Haciendas in Zācātēcās, and his lands extend, with little interruption, as far North as Sān Mātēo, from whence he takes his second title. His riches are immense, and proceed from various sources. According to the data given me by the Administrador, he has of ganado mayor, y menor, (horned cattle, sheep, and goats,) with horses, and mules, (cavallada, y mulada,) at Sierra Hermosa, and other places, three millions of live stock. Of these, 30,000 sheep are sent annually to the Mexican market, where they average from twenty to twenty-four reals, (two and a half and three dollars) each.

As many goats are slaughtered at the Casa de Matanza of the Jārāl, where tallow (Cebo) is made from the fat, which sells upon the spot for four and a half dollars the arroba, and is often retailed in Mexico at two reals the pound. The skins are worth six or eight reals each, and are disposed of to the leather-dressers of Guādālājārā and San Luis Pötösī.

The ratio of increase for wheat in the valley of the Jārāl is twenty-five to one, a thousand fanegas being the ordinary produce of forty fanegas sown. In a good year the crop infinitely exceeds this, and

has been known to amount to two thousand fanegas. When converted into flour in the Count's own mills, the wheat sells at San Luis (sixteen leagues distance) for fourteen and fifteen dollars the Carga, of two fanegas, which are reckoned equivalent to three hundred pounds.

Maize averages usually from two hundred to two hundred and fifty for one; but the price, in ordinary years, seldom rises above twelve reals the fanega.

From five to six thousand arrobas of Chile are likewise produced in the vicinity of the Järäl. It is worth, in Mexico, six dollars the arroba, while the carriage and alcavala are paid with one.

The great fertility of the valley of the Järäl is due to the abundant supply of water distributed, apparently with profusion, to every part of the estate, from an immense "presa," constructed sixty years ago by the grandfather of the present Count. The front wall of this "presa" is 2,008 varas in length, and of immense thickness. It intercepts the whole of the water that descends during the rainy season from the surrounding mountains. The basin in which this water is received, though artificial, has, from its size, the appearance of a natural lake. It is surrounded by trees, and is situated about three leagues to the South-west of the house. Part of the road lies, as usual, through uncultivated land, and part through vast fields of maize; but the temperature of the valley formed an agreeable contrast to the cold which we had experienced in crossing the high plains between La Tlächiquerä and the Puerto

dě Sän Bärtölö; and the sight of any thing like water or vegetation was delightful, after the deserts which we had passed, covered with broken rocks, the cactus, and dwarf palms. I rode to the reservoir on one of the Count's horses, not of the old breed, for which the Hacienda was celebrated before the Revolution, (for that has become almost extinct,) but spirited, and with high, though easy action.

Nothing could be more hospitable than our reception at the Järäl, with the exception of the absence of the master, who either from shyness, or, as it was alleged, from urgent business, left the Hacienda with his family the day before our arrival, and deputed his Administrador to do the honours. We found, however, a splendid dinner prepared, and the whole house thrown open for our accommodation, with a crowd of servants in waiting to take charge of the baggage, and to arrange it in the different rooms. On the following morning, when, notwithstanding the solicitations of the Administrador, we pursued our journey towards San Luis, a mule was sent with us, laden with a whole sheep, a dozen fowls, four cheeses, a quantity of bread and fruit, and four bottles of a strong spirit called vino Mescal, resembling whiskey in flavour, but extracted from the Mägüey, in a distillery recently established by the Count.

The Järäl is the last place of any note in the State of Guänäjuatō. The village attached to the Hacienda contains three thousand inhabitants, five hundred of whom are more immediately "depen-

dientes de la casa," (yearly servants of the family,) while the rest, though not in permanent annual employment, derive their subsistence from the same source. The Count's house, with the church and other buildings connected with it, are solid and spacious, though by no means magnificent. The pueblo presents an appearance of wretchedness totally unworthy of its vicinity to the abode of so wealthy a proprietor: it consists almost entirely of mud huts, and many of these are in a state of decay.

Nov. 24. From the Jārāl to San Luis Pōtōsī, sixteen leagues.

The road, on leaving the valley of El Jārāl, passes near a large pueblo called El Valle de San Francisco, four leagues from the Hacienda, and runs from thence to Tierra Blanca three leagues, La Pila three leagues, Real de los Pozos two, and San Luis three and a half. La Pila and Los Pozos were formerly amalgamation works, in which the ores from the mines of the Cerro de San Pedro were reduced. These mines have been abandoned for many years on account of the extreme poverty of the ores, which, notwithstanding a "ley de oro," by no means inconsiderable, will not defray the expence of working. Eighty thousand dollars were spent in a fruitless attempt to bring them into activity about ten years ago; but the heaps of old slag that are to be seen at the present day in every direction about San Luis attest their former abundance, as the epithet of Pōtōsī, bestowed upon the Intendancy, bespeaks the

reputation which they at one time enjoyed for wealth.

The State of San Luis possesses a population of 250,000 souls. The capital, including the "barrios," or suburbs, which cover a great extent of ground, contains between fifty and sixty thousand inhabitants, and it is supposed that as many more are concentrated within a circle of six leagues in its immediate vicinity.

The State Congress is composed of fourteen deputies, elected in the proportion of one for each twenty thousand souls. In ecclesiastical matters San Luis is dependent upon the Bishoprics of Guādālājārā and Valladolid, between which the spiritual jurisdiction over its territory is divided.

The revenue proceeds from the same sources as that of Guāñājūatō, with the exception of the "Contribucion Directa," which has not been tried. It has proved sufficient to cover, hitherto, the whole expenditure of the State, as well as its "contingent," San Luis, in 1826, not being one dollar in arrears with the Federation. This is partly owing to the excellent management of the present Governor, Don José Ildefonso Diaz de Leon, a man of great activity and intelligence, and partly to the advantages which San Luis derives from its situation as the natural depôt for the trade of Tampico, with the Northern and Western States. Zācātēcās, Sōmbrērētē, Dūrāngō, and Guādālājārā already draw from this source a large proportion of their foreign imports;