

## LIFE IN MEXICO.

## CHAPTER V.—THE INDIAN ATTACK.

In Cincinnati I had purchased a light traveling wagon in which to take my wife and two children from Matamoras in Mexico to the city of Guanajuato in the year 1849. I also purchased a side saddle and a set of double harnesses at the same place. Our trip by steamboat down to New Orleans was a very pleasant one indeed, a well managed boat and very agreeable fellow passengers, while our voyage across the Gulf of Mexico to Brownsville in Texas, on the Rio Grande opposite Matamoras was, if possible, more so and after a lapse of more than thirty years I still retain a very grateful remembrance of the many acts of politeness we one and all received on this last trip especially.

I stored my baggage at Brownsville and went alone across to the city of Matamoras to make arrangements for our inland journey to the Southwards with as little delay as possible, I also here received much politeness without any of those unpleasant acts of rudeness that so many travelers have experienced from Mexican officials, and of which I have had good reason to complain in other parts of the same country.

After some little trouble I bought four good stout Mexican horses that had been partially broken to harness, and in good time started on our journey, my party consisting of my own family, an Englishman who was proceeding to the same destination and a Mexican Mozo or servant who professed to be a good coachman; we were joined by a Mexican Colonel with his lady and married man servant who also had his wife with him.

The first start as is frequently the case was not without its unpleasant incidents, but finally we got fairly on our road to the interior; our route was through a nearly level country not far from the Southern bank of the Rio Grande in a Westerly direction towards the city of Monterey which was to be our first resting place; in the whole course of my travels, I have never seen a country so well stocked with game as this was from the time we left Matamoras until we reached Cadereita, within a few miles of Monterey; herds of Quail almost under our horses feet, flocks of wild turkeys were seen at almost every hour of the day and one had only to ride a few hundred yards off the main road to start up hares innumerable, and deer from single pairs up to herds of a dozen or more; while every little pond of water was literally alive with geese, cranes and other water fowl; in fact it was literally a hunters' paradise, the only one I have ever seen. The rainy season was over, the crops were ripe and harvested, being in the latter part of the month of October; the country was still covered with verdure and all the streams were full. I know how all this would be changed in the course of two or three months, when what appeared now to be an earthly paradise would be converted into almost a desert, the ground would be bare, the streams and ponds nearly or altogether dry under the influence of a burning sun and scorching winds, while at the best of times this district has an evil reputation as the home of all kinds of malarial diseases; we however escaped exposed though we were to its evil influences, not one of the party experienced the slightest ill effects from our daily and nightly exposure. We were assured at Matamoras that there was not the slightest danger of our being molested by robbers or Indians between that city and Monterey, but that beyond the latter place the road was very dangerous, as travelers were constantly being assaulted by both classes of evil minded men; the Indians (Comanches) showing no mercy to those who might be so unfortunate as to fall into their hands; while the Mexican bandit was usually content with only despoiling his victims of all their movables.

Strange that this large tract of magnificent land that would if brought into cul-

tivation maintain hundreds of thousands of human beings, should be still in a state of nature, and almost uninhabited; in fact it was quite an event to meet or to overtake one traveler in the course of a days journey, from sunrise to sunset; and when we did arrive at a rancho or even village, the chances were that, although in a land teeming with natural wealth, we should not be able to purchase, at any price, either provisions for ourselves, or corn or fodder for our animals.

Fortunately I had taken the precaution to lay in a good stock of hard biscuit, dried beef, coffee, sugar and other necessaries in Matamoras, so that for some time we did not fare badly on the whole, but our animals frequently did; although I invariably purchased all the corn for them that we could conveniently carry whenever an opportunity offered; the few inhabitants of the country we were passing through, appeared to be all in a state of absolute want of the commonest necessaries of life; at the same time they seemed to be perfectly, not only satisfied with, but resigned to their lot, and to have no desire to improve it; or perhaps in charity, one might suppose, that seeing no reasonable hope of improvement, they were philosophically resigned to vegetate and not to live.

One of the main causes of the desert condition of this fine land, was and is, the fact that it is all owned in immense tracts by a few individuals, scarcely one of whom dares to live on his property, but leaves it in charge of an Administrator or Mayor-domo, while he himself lives in comparative safety in the Capital of the State, or perhaps in the City of Mexico itself, on such a portion of the rents as his agent can collect or think proper to send him; some of these estates contain as much land as some counties in the United States and Canada, and are nearly all devoted to pasturage only.

We finally arrived at the good old city of Monterey, the scene of one of the triumphs of the American army a few years previously; I saw the same type of buildings that I had been accustomed to see in the Midland States of the County, inhabited by the same type of human beings, it was Mexico again, unchanged, and at that time I thought unchangeable; I little thought how soon a change was to take place which would operate like the "Elixir of Life" and by getting rid of old ideas of exclusiveness, the country has since been opened up to foreign enterprise and liberality of opinion, and is fast getting covered with a network of railroads, which will soon place Mexico in a very respectable position amongst the civilized nations.

Here we put up at the old time "Mason," a square walled enclosure, with rooms around three of the sides, stables &c., on the remaining side, and a large open space in the centre; these rooms boast of a door, one window, a raised place or perhaps a wooden structure for a bed, one pine table, one chair and one candlestick, and all this accommodation for the sum of one quarter of a dollar per diem; for the animals a charge of a *medio real* (6 cents) is made per diem; and it is expected the guests will purchase all the supplies they require from the House, provided they can be supplied, although it is not established as a rule, and as a natural consequence the House is seldom provided with any large amount of such supplies.

Instead of remaining in this city as I intended, for one day to rest ourselves and to recruit our animals, we were compelled to remain eighteen. I had handed my heavy luggage to an American teamster, who engaged to deliver it in Monterey within a certain period, which would have suited my plans admirably, but unfortunately he had engaged in some smuggling transactions, had had all his train seized by the Customs authorities, had crossed into Texas, hired a band of armed men who rescued his property, and had finally reached his destination nearly twenty days behind time; this delay was the cause of great inconvenience and considerably increased expenditure to me, as well as of much uneasiness to my friends in Guanajuato who did not know what

had become of me.

The day before we left Monterey rumours were afloat that large bodies of Comanche Indians had been seen in the neighborhood of the City, who would inevitably infest the road we had to travel as for many leagues this crossed the track they always used in their periodical incursions into the more settled parts of the country; and on the day we left it was currently reported that they had assaulted the little village of Santa Catarina which is almost in the suburbs, however unpleasant this news was to me, I could not afford to let it delay me any longer; so we took up our line of march, determined to run the gauntlet; our road left the village a short distance on our left hand, but on attempting to cross a small stream at a short distance from it, a brute of a horse balked in the middle, and finally laid down and broke the tongue of the wagon to which he was attached; this was a misfortune for which we were not prepared, and I even feared it would not admit of repair, as the wood was of very inferior quality, scarcely strong enough to make a gallows to hang the man who used such inferior wood for such an important purpose; a fate he richly deserved to meet; after no little trouble we got to the other side and were compelled to go to the village for repairs.

We drove into it and almost through it without seeing or hearing a human being; it appeared to be completely deserted; I however saw a blacksmiths shop and there stopped to reconnoitre; after some delay a miserable looking individual appeared from some hiding place, and announced the fact that he was the blacksmith himself; with a deal of coaxing I got him to apply his science for my benefit, and after a time the tongue was spliced, and two bands of iron put on the splice to make all secure.

By some means our arrival became known, and soon people began to appear from most unexpected quarters, evincing unbounded astonishment at our hardihood, and assuring us, that we were running wilfully into danger by proceeding on our journey at that time; but I told them "Needs must when the devil drives," there was as much danger behind us as before us, and perhaps more.

While the blacksmith was engaged with the repairs of my wagon, a woman spoke to me, and entreated me to go to see her son who had been badly wounded by the Indians that morning; I told her I knew nothing of surgery, but she still persisted in her desire, and to please the poor soul, who was evidently in great distress, I accompanied her to her house; here I found the poor man stretched on a mat on the floor, lying on his stomach, with two arrow wounds in his loins, one on each side of the backbone, one arrow head had been extracted, but the other was deeply buried in the body, the shaft having dropped off, he was bleeding internally and evidently sinking fast; I told the poor afflicted mother what I thought, and that no human means could save her sons life; in fact he died before we left the village.

He had been one of four in charge of stock that were pasturing near the village but whether horses, mules or cattle I have forgotten, they were attacked in the grey of the morning, quite unexpectedly by a band of Comanches, three were killed on the spot, he ran for dear life and while running was shot in the back with arrows; he managed to reach the village and give the alarm before he dropped exhausted and dying; this therefore was proof positive that danger did surround us, that our task was to be no easy one, that lay before us; unceasing vigilance and unflinching determination would assist us a good deal, but we well knew that if we should be attacked by an outlying party of Comanches, it would be at a time when we should be off our guard, and that in all likelihood not one of us would escape to tell the tale; our minds were made up to encounter the worst, and not to fall alive into their hands. And so we journeyed on; I cannot say, and do not think that any of us felt quite easy in mind at the prospect before us but I can say that not one indi-

vidual of those composing our little party, gave utterance to one single word manifesting fear or doubt of the issue, but that one and all appeared to accept the position in which we were placed, and at the same time was determined to do his duty.

Our next objective point was the city of Saltillo; but to reach it we had many leagues to cover, and all the time by night and by day, exposed to assaults, which, if delivered by Comanche Indians in their usual style would inevitably annihilate the whole party; with our minds so engrossed and our nerves so highly strung, every hillock appeared to hide and every clump of trees or thicket to contain the dreaded foes; while in this unenviable state of mind, our party became separated by a distance of about half a mile, owing to the wretched state of the road that had been flooded by the recent rains; the sandy knolls would be dry and offer no impediment to our onward march; while the clayey hollows would be converted into tenacious mud, causing considerable delay to the carriage that might be in it at the time, while the other having struck the sandy knoll on the other side would continue its march, sometimes covering quite a distance, and so causing a separation in the party; in one of these separations the carriage of the Mexican Colonel was in front, while ours was just emerging from a muddy spot, when his man came back on the gallop requesting assistance as his master was being attacked; I left the Englishman to bring on my party and rode on myself to the front; when I arrived the Colonel told me he had seen the heads of some men protrude from among the bushes about two hundred yards ahead, and had thought it prudent to take to cover and hasten on my arrival; I could as yet see nothing to cause alarm, after waiting awhile my carriage arrived, I put my wife and children under cover as well as I could, gave my wife one of my revolvers for a purpose she well understood and was prepared to execute, and then commenced to take measures to ascertain what foundation there was for alarm; I took to the woods on my right and keeping under cover as much as possible, advanced to reconnoitre; after having advanced about one hundred yards in this fashion, I caught sight of a party of imperfectly armed men, lying in ambush apparently for our party; fortunately before firing on them I saw some mules with packsaddles on them, some bundles of merchandise near them and the smouldering remains of a fire where there had been an encampment over night; they were evidently a party of muleteers who were taking the same precautions against an attack from us; that we were against an attack from them; with some little difficulty communication was established between us, mutual explanations followed, and I returned to release my party from their state of anxiety, here I found the Colonel and his man with their firearms fully prepared for the attack, the Englishman at a little distance watching over my party, and these so nicely hidden in the bushes and long grass that I almost stepped on them before I saw them; this alarm so happily dissipated, we continued our toilsome journey without further personal alarm until we reached the city of Saltillo, not however without seeing in the recently burnt homesteads on our road sufficient evidence to prove to us that it was not a path of roses; fortunately for us the road itself soon dried up and as we were getting out of the track of the rains it continued dry, in fact we were fast approaching the great table land of Mexico, a continuation southwards of what has been called the great American Desert; in some parts this table land almost merits the name, but in others, where water can be procured, its soil proves to be very fruitful.

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