

For The Land We Live In.

Life In Mexico.

THE BITER BIT.

In the year 1855— I was the happy possessor of two horses, that had the reputation of being among the best, if not the best in the district; one was a beautiful black, not very fleet and rather aged; but of great powers of endurance, without a blemish, and gentle almost to a fault; the other, a roan, was almost the antipodes of the black one, as he was not at all handsome, but as fleet as a stag, and I believe as untiring; but with a fearful temper, that was at times dangerous to his rider; in fact after I had become his owner, at a price that appeared to me ridiculously low, I was informed that he had nearly killed two of his previous owners, and the number of those could scarcely be counted, so often had he changed hands within a short period.

I however did not have very much trouble with him, although he did break out at times; on the other hand I found his good qualities were so marked that I kept him until I left that part of the country some years after the date of the following episode.

I was stationed at that time at a place in the mountains, at a distance of about seven miles in a northerly direction from the City of Guanajuato, and was in the habit of riding down to that city nearly every Sunday morning and returning in the evening accompanied by a mounted man servant, who sometimes led one of my horses while I rode the other.

I had received one or two friendly cautions from Mexican friends to return early on these occasions, which I had hitherto quite neglected; but as for some time past robberies with violence and even murders had become rather frequent on that road, I had determined in future to follow the advice I had received and to return by daylight. I however found it more difficult to carry out my intention than I had anticipated, as I could not convince my friends in Guanajuato that their existed any greater reason for prudence than in the past, some of them even twitting me with showing the white feather. This discussion amongst other reasons kept me on one occasion later than my usual hour of departure, and when I started for home mounted on the black, the sun had long sunk beneath the horizon, but in compensation the moon was rising in great splendour, enabling us when the road was moderately level to trot on without any inconvenience.

So soon as we had passed the last houses and had entered on the lonely part of our ride, I took out a Colts' revolver (of which I carried two) and carried it in my hand ready prepared for any emergency, and well it proved for me that I had taken that precaution, as on our reaching a small stretch of tolerably level road on the crest of one of the spurs of the mountain we were ascending, I heard a whistle near me; my man had barely time to say "¡Qui estan los compadres Señor" when four well mounted men with their faces covered all but the eyes with white handkerchiefs, put in their appearance, two of them ranging themselves one on each side of my horse, and the other two performing the same manoeuvre with my servant. The act was so sudden and so neatly executed that it appeared as if it must be successful, but by some sudden inspiration which I cannot account for even now, I lifted my revolver and put it in the face of the man on my right hand, threatening him with instant death unless he immediately sent away his comrades, and as I felt how much depended on this being done, I suppose he saw that I was determined to carry out my threat; he after a moment's hesitation gave the order to disperse, which they immediately obeyed. He then wished to leave also, but I thought it would be safer for me to take him on with me, so I compelled him much against his will to accompany me the few remaining miles to my destination. During the canter home he tried to bolt but found I had the heels of him. I told him

not to try the experiment again as my patience might possibly give out, and in fact he well knew that if I had been a Mexican he would have been shot then and there, he thought better of it, and on our arrival at La Luz I let him go, when he quickly disappeared down a bye street, and as good old John Bunyan says "I saw him no more."

A few days afterwards I was privately informed that the parties were well known that they had no desire to do me any grievous bodily harm, their intention being merely to rob me and leave me tied in some secluded spot, where some friend of their own would probably be entrusted with the task of finding and releasing me. The main objects of their cupidity were my horses, which they hoped to sell for a large price at the fair of "San Juan de los Lagos" which was then being held. However true this may have been I know not, but this I know, that although robberies on that road did not by any means cease, or even diminish in number, and that I continued to make my weekly visits as before, I was never again molested on it.

Those rides in the mountains on the table land have a strange and strong fascination for all those who have any taste for equestrian exercise; the climate is so exhilarating, so equable, and the air so balmy; no burning sun to enervate the frame, and no chilling frosts to dampen the sense of thorough enjoyment; but generally a clear sky, a moderate degree of heat, and, nearly always, a gentle breeze to keep the air in motion; one appears to be breathing anew the breath of life; the rainy season is short, and if possible still more pleasant than the dry; storms are few and far between, and seldom or never violent; in fact, I know of no part of this beautiful earth where life ought to be so thoroughly enjoyable as on this table land in the Middle States of the Republic of Mexico; but this bright picture has its reverse side as well as all others; it appears to be almost universally the case, that in those countries where God has done the most for man, man has done the least for himself; it certainly is the case in Mexico; a country that possesses within itself every requisite to human happiness, in the greatest abundance, and with the need of but little exertion; from some cause that is to me incomprehensible, there appears to be a lack of every thing, at times of the most necessary articles of food; the country is almost a wilderness, the cities are crowded with inhabitants, nine-tenths of whom are in a chronic state of poverty, and a very large number indeed in a state of complete destitution; immense tracts of fruitful land in the immediate neighbourhood of populous cities have not a vestige of cultivation. Land, that before the Spanish conquest teemed with inhabitants who cultivated it like a garden; the Indian descendants of those inhabitants who are still so happy as to possess some land of their own, are almost the only exceptions to the general rule, their properties are in their own style, well cultivated and very productive.

It is quite a sight to see those poor Indians on their way to the cities with their produce for sale. Some of them possess burros (donkeys); these little animals are almost hidden under the bulky loads under which they have to trudge. Those who are too poor to possess a four-footed beast of burden, themselves take the place and do the work. I have frequently seen them, I might say by hundreds, men, women, and children, plodding along on the dusty roads, each one carrying his burden on his back, kept in its place by a strap of leather or cow-hide, passed across the forehead, following each other in true Indian file (I never saw two Indians walking alongside each other unless they were drunk), with their heads down, and their bodies bent at a most painful looking angle, but trotting on where the road would be level, as if their loads formed part and parcel of themselves. The magnificent railroad movement will in time remedy this, as well as many other antiquated customs, and may even tend to break up the monopoly in land, and taking it up in small lots suitable to men with

moderate means at their command. Then, and not until then, will it be known what a wonderful country Mexico is.

NOMAD.

Spring.

As we look o'er wide extended plain
We see the snow is going.
Joyous spring has come again,
And its gentle waters flowing.

We see the grass a springing
At the path around our feet;
We hear the birds a singing
In cadence low and sweet.

They sing by early morning light
Bespangled with the dew;
And all around the sun shines bright,
'Tis a transporting view.

As we hear those birds of various tune,
And see the stream's a flowing,
We know the time is coming soon
When loved flowers will be growing.

JAMES OWENS.

Johnville.

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