

For The Land We Live In.

## Life In Mexico.

"UN DIA DE CAMPO."—"CURVAS."

In those days (1836), my holidays were few and far between, and when I was so fortunate as to obtain one, I had no young companions with whom I could enjoy it, but during the many dreary years of my youth, I did have some few days of such delight, that I think of them still, as amongst the brightest that have fallen to my lot to enjoy. And of these, this first one stands out pre-eminently in bold relief.

I was invited to go with a party of gentlemen, to pass a "dia de campo" at the lovely little "Hacienda de Cuevas," situated on the "Bucio," at a distance of some ten or twelve miles from the city of Guanajuato where I was then residing.

I had heard many wonderful accounts from various parties, especially from Mexicans, of the exquisite loveliness of this favored spot; favored in having an abundance of running water during the whole of the year, besides natural living springs of the pure element, always deliciously cool, no one who has not been for months deprived of such a blessing as an abundance of pure spring water, can possibly enter into the spirit of intense enjoyment with which one who has been contemplating the life giving element, as it gushes forth in all its purity, to diffuse its blessings over the thirsty land.

We were a party of four or five, I, the only youngster of the lot, who were going to make a friendly call on a married couple, who were spending a "temporada" at that lovely spot, for a change of air and scene; well mounted, and in high spirits, we scampered over the beautifully level hard road, that commenced at the foot of the hills; so different from the narrow steep mountain paths we had been confined to for such a length of time. Our horses even appeared to enjoy being able to freely stretch their limbs once more, and required no touch of whip or spur to quicken their movements. But spontaneously burst forth into such an exuberance of spirits, as almost to astonish their owners, who could scarcely recognize, in the bounding steeds beneath them, the sober going, well conducted, respectable beasts that carried them with cautious steps in all security, on their daily round through the mountainous region in which they had their habitations.

The morning was one of the loveliest even in that land of delightful climate, with a cool and bracing breeze, just sufficient to ruffle the leaves of the pepper trees, that laden with their long racemes of scarlet berries hanging from their gracefully drooping boughs, lined the stream on either bank; while the little birds hopped from branch to branch, so silent yet so happy; doves innumerable of three or four different species, flew up in flocks all around us, enlivening the scene; every living thing appeared to my delighted vision to be entering into the spirit of universal enjoyment.

I know my horse and myself enjoyed the hunt immensely, as well as each other's company; having little in common with the seniors of the party, I would gallop on for a mile or so at full stretch then I would dismount, throw myself under a tree, await their arrival and repeat the operation; or as the fit seized me would make a straight dash across the country, searing the hares out of their wits, and return to the road, to find myself perhaps a good way in the rear: a ride, a day never to be forgotten or repeated in this world.

There are a few houses and a *Meson* at the little village of Cuevas, which on our arrival, looked rather dreary, and certainly tempered the exuberance of our spirits down to a state of greater sobriety; I for one could see nothing of the rural beauty that I had been led to expect; and had our experience of the "Hacienda de Cuevas" been limited to what we saw in this part of it, we should, I fear, unanimously, have pronounced it a fraud;

but fortunately this was not the case; our friends had taken up their domicile in the house of the Hacienda, itself; and at the "Salon" of that house, we, in due time, dismounted just before the sun began to be too hot for us to enjoy a longer ride exposed to his burning rays.

We were of course most hospitably received, and well entertained; after partaking of a substantial "almuerzo" or "dejeuner a la fourchette" (pity we have not in English a name for this substantial second breakfast; luncheon does not appear to me to meet the requirement at all), I, all alone proceeded to explore and enjoy the beauties of the enclosed garden and grounds of several acres in extent to me at that time a scene of enchantment; long trellised walks intersecting each other in every direction, the trellis-work covered with grapevines in full bearing, loaded with clusters of delicious ripe grapes, hanging within reach of one's hand, with no restriction as to the quantity one might eat; peach trees, pomegranates, apples, pears and quinces in such quantities, I was all but bewildered and lost in a feeling of perfect happiness; at the intersections of the trellised walks fountains played, and around them were ranged solid mason work seats on which to rest when fatigued.

Soon lost sight and all thought of the rest of the party, but after wandering about for I believe some hours in this terrestrial paradise, I came at last to a portion of the grounds that had been left in a state of nature, comparatively speaking; here I found them all congregated under the shade of an immense spreading tree of the ash family ("freixo"), that was growing beside a bubbling spring of water so deliciously cool; the lady sitting in a swing, and the gentleman stretched on the ground, conversing over their wine; one of these had a gun with him, and asked me to accompany him for a walk out on the hills beyond in the hope of shooting some game; we went, but the gentleman was short sighted, although he did not think so himself, and although we saw several hares, pigeons and doves, we did not secure any, to the manifest discomposure of the ardent sportsman, who could not conceive it possible he could fire so many shots at game, without killing something; while I was highly amused at seeing a man attempt to shoot game with spectacles on his nose; this to me was comical in the extreme.

Returning to the garden with an empty game bag, we found the remainder of the party enjoying themselves in their own way, most uproariously, and only waiting our return to proceed with a very important and exceedingly pleasant piece of business, i.e., to discuss a good dinner that was prepared for us, during which, our hunter came in for a good roasting on his want of success; while I as his companion, came in for my share of the chaffing as they said, I ought first to have caught the game, that our friend might have had the pleasure of shooting it afterwards; all was taken in good part, and like a parcel of school boys on a frolic, or like Jack ashore, fun was extracted from every incident; but all good things must have an end, and certainly every good dinner has. The sun was fast declining towards the horizon, the evening was getting deliciously cool, it was time to think of returning to our homes; so bidding farewell to our hospitable entertainers, we mounted for the home stretch. On our trip in the morning, I had been the one to race my horse against time all alone; on our return in the evening, every one appeared to enter into the spirit of racing, each one had the best horse, and neither one would for a moment allow that his was or could be beaten, although trial succeeded trial, and which the horses appeared to enjoy just as much as did the riders. In one of these wild scrambles, one of us started up a "coyote." Tally ho! was the word, and away we all dashed after the cunning brute; we ran him well, and several times got tolerably near to him, but he would in a moment change his course and

throw us all out; as the daylight was fading, and by the light of the moon it was not easy to keep him well in sight. At last I ranged up along side of him, when he suddenly disappeared as if by magic from our view, and was seen no more.

We were now nearing "Marfil," quite a large village, substantially built, situated on the banks of the stream that flowed through the city of Guanajuato, and not far from it; on reaching it a sudden change fell on the spirits and behaviour of the whole party, every one of whom appeared to change like "Harlequin;" not a joke, not a laugh was heard from the lips of any one, every one became as sober as if he had never known what a laugh was and to my utter astonishment, even the horses appeared to understand that the fun was over for the time, as they one and all settled down into their every day sober pace, and like well conducted, respectable horses, once more plodded on in the even tenor of their way, and so continued until each one reached his home, after what had been to me one of the happiest of the few happy days that fell to my lot during my solitary youth; it was one of those to which one can look back in after years with only one regret, and that merely that there had not been more of them.

I have made several subsequent visits to this Hacienda, and generally with pleasant companions, but neither of them was so enjoyable as the first.

This lovely property, which from its proximity to the populous city of Guanajuato is of exceptional value, was many years ago owned by a rich Mexican, Don Pedro Otero a very eccentric individual, who was even more addicted to the vice of gambling than the majority of his countrymen; he had met with losses at play, this being the last piece of real estate remaining to him; one evening he sat down with his cronies to the national game of "Monte;" he played the whole night through, and by sunrise the next day, this terrestrial paradise also had passed into the hands of his fellow gamblers; at the time this was related to me I had seen the place only once, and I then thought if it had happened to me to lose such a property, I should wish myself dead, and I fancy I still think the same.

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