

## THE TWO MINERS OF FAMATINA.

The great mountain of Famatina, situated in the province of Rioja, has long been looked upon traditionally as the depository of enormous wealth in the form of gold and silver ore; but the turning this wealth to any important practical account is a circumstance of very recent date. It is true the King of Spain and his government have made repeated attempts to work the mines known to have formerly existed in this mountain.—But they could never hit upon any inducements sufficiently strong to secure the earnest and active co-operation of the inhabitants, or even to overcome that superstitious horror which had been left as a legacy to them by their simple, but in this instance, perhaps, wise ancestors, relative to the dangers—unnamed and unknown, but not the less effectual in their influence—attendant on the task of exploring the vast and naturally terrific solitudes immediately surrounding the objects of search. The early Indians, just referred to, had also adopted another precaution, as if with the view of deterring their descendants from the perilous enterprise in question—perilous even, more on account of the cupidity which its results excited in their European masters, than in the actual physical hardships and evils connected with it. On ceasing to work the mines, they carefully built up and concealed, by every means in their power, the various openings to them, so as to remove all clue, if possible, to the exploring of them in future.

At length, however, in 1805, two wretched clai men, both mounted on one sorry mule, and armed with one old musket, were seen riding into the village of Chilecito. On inquiry, it appeared that these men had travelled from Peru in the manner just described, and had supported themselves on their journey entirely by the aid of their old gun, with which they had killed, from time to time, what they needed for their subsistence. It was ascertained, too, that having been long engaged, as labourers in the Peruvian mines, and having acquired the knowledge necessary for their purpose, they had left that country solely with the view of seeking their fortunes in the mountains of Famatina—the traditional reports of its wealth having long ago reached the country from which they came.

The two penniless and friendless adventurers, from a distant land, looked on the wondrous mountain, of which they had heard so much; and seeing in its now visible form literally "a mine of wealth," they determined within themselves to explore and take possession of its treasures, or perish in the attempt. On their arrival at Chilecito, they were literally destitute of every thing necessary to their enterprise, except the unquenchable desire and determination to accomplish it which constitutes in such cases great part of the required power. They had not even brought with them any of the mining tools necessary for the commencement of their operations, nor a farthing of money to purchase them. These, therefore, together with the supply of provisions indispensable to their very existence, while working on a spot near which none could, by possibility, be procured, they contrived to obtain on credit, from a curate of Chilecito, named Granillo, who agreed to supply them with what they needed, to the amount of thirty dollars, on condition that, if they succeeded in their undertaking, they were to repay him double the amount within a certain time; and, with these supplies, they started for the mountain the very day after their arrival in its neighbourhood. They proceeded on foot themselves, as it was necessary to load their mule with the provisions, tools, &c., which they were enabled by the curate to take with them. It is said that the hardships they endured, for the first three or four days, were almost incredible; for, during the whole of that time, they were exposed to the fury of a snow-storm, almost naked, and without firing, or even shelter. At the end of that time they had contrived to dig out a small cave in the side of the rock to shelter them at night from the snow and rain; and there they used to lie close together, with no other means of avoiding being frozen to death, but that of receiving the animal warmth of each other. Their only provisions were biscuit, and a little dried beef, or *charqui*, which they were obliged to eat cold, having as I said, no means of procuring firing of any kind. Nevertheless, they persevered—their first attempt being made at that part of the mountain called the Cerro Negro, where, after working for some time, they discovered a small vein of virgin silver, mixed with sulphuret of silver. They continued to work upon this for about a month, never quitting the mountain during that period; at the end of which time, having collected together as much ore as they could carry, they returned with it to Chilecito. As all mining speculations had ceased in that neighbourhood, they were now at a loss how to turn their little treasure to account, by reducing it to a tangible form. This, however, they at last effected, by grinding the ore to powder, on a large flat stone, as painters grind their colours, and then triturating it with mercury to extract the silver. The produce of this their first adventure was about one hundred dollars, with which, hav-

ing first paid the curate his promised sixty dollars, they purchased more provisions, and a little clothing, and then returned to the mountain, and were heard of no more for three months. At the end of that time, one of them came back to the village, with sufficient silver ore to purchase two additional mules, for the purpose of bringing back the increasing produce of their labours. And thus they went on for about twelve months, never quitting the mountain but when compelled to return in search of provisions. It was understood that, by this time, they had accumulated a capital of about two thousand dollars; and about this time it was that they discovered the rich mine called Santo Domingo. They now found themselves sufficiently beforehand with the world to feel justified in hiring labourers from the village to work for them; and having also purchased a spot of ground in the valley of Famatina, in which there was a convenient fall of water from one of the mountain rivulets, Juan Leita, who was a man of great mechanical ingenuity, constructed with his own hands a trapichi mill, for the purpose of grinding the ore on a larger scale. The whole of this construction he completed without assistance; and then, being the harder man of the two, he returned to the mountain, to work and superintend the operations there, while Echavaria came to reside at the mill, and attend to the extraction of the metal from the ore. In this manner they proceeded for ten years, by which time they had accumulated a capital of a hundred thousand dollars. But in doing this they had excited the malicious envy of the Riojanos, whose cupidity made them covet the wealth which their want of industry prevented them from even attempting to compass for themselves by similar means. At this period, too, the revolution broke out, and afforded the means in some measure, to accomplish the object which was now contemplated by some of the heads of the people. The first step taken against them was to order them to pay a contribution of a thousand dollars for the service of the state. This was no sooner complied with, than another was sent for a similar sum, and shortly afterwards others to the amount of five thousand dollars more. On this, Echavaria, who was at once a shrewd and timorous man, and foresaw the storm that was brewing, endeavoured to prevail on Leita to join him in retiring to Peru with the property they had amassed. But Leita refused to consent; and the result was, that they came to the resolution of dividing their property, and Echavaria made his escape immediately after, having first buried, in a spot near the mill, that portion of his gains which he was not able to carry with him.—Shortly after the departure of Echavaria, it was reported that Leita had discovered another mine, still richer than any of those they had hitherto been working upon. Whether this was true or not, it had the effect of exciting still further the cupidity of the new government, and an order was speedily sent to Leita, requiring him to furnish a still larger contribution. This he had expected, and had prepared himself for, by burying in the ground nearly all his treasures; and his reply to the government order was, that they had already deprived him of all his gains.—But they were not to be put off in this manner. On receiving the above reply, they immediately had a meeting of the Cabildo, in the town of Rioja; and the result was the sending a militia officer, and twenty men, to take Leita into custody, and lodge him in prison, under the pretence that he was an old Spaniard, and an enemy to the state. The party arrived at his house, in the Escaleras, just as he was sitting down to dinner; and having immediately taken him, and placed heavy fetters upon his legs, they were about to place him on a horse, and carry him away. But he determined on having recourse to stratagem, with the view of, if possible, gaining his liberty, and escaping from their hands. Accordingly, pretending the utmost submission to the commands of the government, he invited the party to take some dinner with him before they set out, and offered to supply them with some excellent wine, which he possessed. This proposal was immediately accepted by the officer commanding the party; and, as the only servant of Leita, a black slave, had ran away on the approach of the military party, Leita offered to wait on them himself, and fetch the wine, serve the dinner, &c. This he did for some time with great apparent good humour, and with great satisfaction to the party; who, as their spirits waxed higher with Leita's excellent wine, grew more favourably disposed towards their prisoner; and the head of them, seeing with what alacrity he went in and out in their service, observed that it was a pity he should be so much inconvenienced by his fetters, and ordered them to be taken off. Freed from this encumbrance, he still kept running in and out doing their bidding, and supplying them with more wine; till at length, having ascertained the position and arms of the three sentinels who had been placed without, he watched his opportunity, and suddenly closed the door (which shut with a spring latch) on the drinking party within; and then, having by great resolution and strength, disarmed and put to flight the sentinels, he presented himself at the window of the room where the rest were enclosed, and threatened with an axe to chop off

the head of the first person who offered to escape by that exit. Then, still keeping watch over the now drunken party within the room, he whistled for his black slave, (who, it appeared, had only been sent out of the way to conceal himself with the view of assisting his master's project); Leita ordered him to prepare the two best horses of the party and bring them to him, and to unsaddle and turn loose all the rest. This being done according to his desire, both master and man mounted, and were soon at a great distance on the road across the Andes to Coquimbo in Chile. They rode day and night, but by the time they had reached the central ridge of the Andes, their horses sunk under them from fatigue; and, on seeing their pursuers approaching in the distance, they abandoned their horses, and continued their flight on foot, making for the crags and precipices where their pursuers could not possibly follow. They were now safe for the present; and in a few days Leita made his appearance before the Spanish Royalist, General Osorio, representing who he was, and the circumstances under which he had left Rioja; and stating that if the general would supply him with a certain number of men he would engage speedily to reduce the whole province to the dominion of the Spanish monarchy. Osorio could not supply Leita with the required means, but was induced, by his representations, to provide him with letters of recommendation to Pezuela, the viceroys of Peru, who, he said, would be likely to further his view in the proposed project. But to deliver these letters, it was necessary that Leita should travel through a tract of country in the provinces of Tucuman and Salta, at the imminent risk of falling in with his enemies. He therefore determined on disguising himself as a poor miner, and taking with him only one attendant as a guide on the road he was to go, leaving his own faithful black behind him to avoid suspicion. In this manner he reached in safety the boundary of the province of Salta. But here, observing a scouting party of fifty men in the distance, Leita hid his money and papers in the thicket hard by; which he had scarcely accomplished when the party came up, and began to make illusory inquiries, which he at first refused to answer, for fear of causing suspicion by his Arragon accent. At last, being compelled by their ill usage and threats to speak, he described himself as a poor miner in search of work. But, as he had feared, his accent excited further suspicions, and they proceeded to beat him and his guide, till the latter at last confessed who Leita was, though he could not disclose the object of his travelling that road. But another blow or two soon induced him to confess where his master had hidden his papers and money; and these disclosed all they wished to know. They then immediately conducted their prisoner to the city of Tucuman; where he was subjected to a brief and summary trial, and was immediately condemned to death for being in correspondence with the enemies of the Patria. Soon after his condemnation, a priest, named Jose Augustus Colombes, came to confess Leita; and, with the view of extracting from him the knowledge of where he had hidden his supposed treasures, he promised to procure a grant of his life, on condition of such disclosure. Leita was easily induced, under his desperate circumstances, to fall into this snare; and having made the desired confession to the wily priest, he was almost immediately shot in the Plaza of the town. Two years after this, the above-named priest made a journey to the Escaleras, for the purpose, as is supposed, of taking away the buried treasure, the knowledge of which he had extracted from its owner; and thus concluded the first modern mining enterprise of the Famatina.

When Rivadavia came into power in Buenos Ayres, he sent to the governor of Rioja for a statement of the general state of the mines with the view of turning them to a national account. The consequence was that a great company was formed at Buenos Ayres under the auspices of Messrs. Hullet, Brothers and Co. consisting partly of English and partly of native merchants; and to this company the right of working all the mines in the province of Rioja was conceded for a certain period, and under settled restrictions.

It may be well to close this sketch by a brief notice of the present, or at least the very recent, condition of the mines at Famatina. Some years ago, the number of working miners, employed on the mountain, was rather less than four hundred, a comparatively insignificant number, when it is considered that the mountain is twenty leagues in length, and that not more than about one-fourth of that extent had been, in any way explored for mining purposes, and even that portion had been examined very imperfectly. Indeed, so rude was the method then employed of working the mines, and so inexhaustible are the riches supposed to be which they contain, that, at the time referred to, the miners used to turn away with contempt from any spot which did not contain ore capable of returning 640 ounces of silver for every *cajon* (about 4,800lb); and many of the mines then in work produced an average of four times that proportion. Moreover, so defective was the system of working the

mines, it was perfectly well understood that the workmen stole at least half the produce. Yet, notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the profits of working the mines were understood to be immense, as compared with the capital employed for the purpose.

Finally, it may be mentioned, that the mountain of Famatina presents, from the village of Chilecito, a most beautiful and noble appearance, especially early in the morning, when its enormous snow-crowned ridges are just receiving the first rays of the sun. At this period of the day, indeed, it is usually enveloped, for the most part, in light mists. But as these clear away before the increasing power of the sun as it rises, the various effects of light and shade are most curious and beautiful; and when, at last, the whole is enveloped in the full blaze of day, the effect is truly magnificent.

**PUBLIC SERVANTS.**—In an admonition addressed by the present Emperor of China to the officers of his government, is this remarkable passage.—“He who sincerely serves his country, leaves the fragrance of a good name to a hundred ages; he who dares not, leaves a name that stinks for ten thousands of years.”

**FEAR.**—Charles Gustavus (the successor of Christina of Sweden) was besieging Prague, when a boor of most extraordinary visage desired admittance to his tent, and, being allowed entrance, offered, by way of amusing the king, to devour a whole hog, weighing two hundred weight, in his presence. The old General Konigsmarc, who stood by the king's side, and who, soldier as he was, had not got rid of the prejudices of his childhood, hinted to his royal master that the peasant ought to be burnt as a sorcerer. “Sir,” said the fellow, irritated at the remark, “if your majesty will but make that old gentleman take off his sword and his spurs, I will eat him before you, before I begin the pig.” General Konigsmarc (who at the head of a body of Swedes had performed wonders against the Austrians, and who was looked upon as one of the bravest men of the age) could not stand this proposal, especially as it was accompanied by a most hideous and preternatural expansion of the frightful peasant's jaws. Without uttering a word the veteran suddenly turned round, ran out of the court, and thought not himself safe until he had arrived at his quarters.

**AN EASY RECIPE.**—In moist or rainy weather we feel oppressed and drowsy, because all moisture greedily absorbs our electricity, which is a buoyant cordial of the body. To remedy this inconvenience, we have only to discover a good non-conductor of electricity to prevent its escape from the body, and this we have in silk, which is so excellent a non-conductor, that the thunder-bolt or the forked lightning itself could not pass through the thinnest silk handkerchief, provided always that it is quite dry. Those therefore who are apt to become low spirited, and listless in damp weather, will find silk waistcoats, drawers, and stockings, the most powerful of all cordials.

## POETRY.

## THE BIRTH OF PORTRAITURE.

By T. Moore.

“As once a Grecian maiden wove  
Her garland 'midst the summer bow'rs,  
There stood a youth, with eye of love,  
To watch her while she wretched the flow  
The youth was skill'd in painting's art,  
But ne'er had studied woman's brow,  
Nor known the colouring which the heart  
Can shed o'er nature's charms, till now

## CHORUS.

Blest be love, to whom we owe  
All that's fair and bright below.

His hand had pictured many a rose,  
And sketch'd the rays that light the brook;  
But what were these, or what were those,  
To woman's blush, or woman's look?  
“Oh! if such magic pow'r there be,  
This, this,” he cried, “is all my pray'r,  
To paint that living light I see,  
And fix the soul that sparkles there.”

His prayer, as soon as breath'd was heard,  
His pallet, touch'd by love, grew warm,  
And painting saw her hues transferr'd  
From lifeless flowers to woman's form.  
Still as from tint to tint he stole,  
The fair design shone out the more.  
And there was now a life, a soul,  
Where only colours glow'd before.

Then first carnations learn'd to speak,  
And lilies into life were brought;  
While, mantling on the maiden's cheek,  
Young roses kindl'd into thought.  
Then hyacinths their darkest dyes  
Upon the locks of beauty threw;  
And violets, transformed to eyes,  
Inshrined a soul within their blue.

## CHORUS.

Blest be love, to whom we owe  
All that's fair and bright below.  
Sung was cold and painting dim,  
Till song and painting learned from him.”

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