

INTRODUCTORY.

LIFE IN MEXICO

For the Land We Live in.

The following episodes of "Life in Mexico" embracing total length of at least twenty years, at different periods, commencing with the latter part of the year 1834 and ending in 1881, form a portion of the many conversations, I have from time to time held with members of my family, and at their request I have reduced these few to writing. They do not profess to have any literary merit of their own, but they do possess that of absolute truthfulness where I was personally concerned, nor have I attempted in the slightest degree, either to embellish or to spoil them, by drawing on my imagination for effect. Although in common with many, many other foreign residents in that country during the troublous times embraced within the periods above mentioned, I met with losses and some ill treatment in the bargain, I have lived long enough to put this down to the debit of the unsettled state of the country, the cause of which is not far to seek, and not to Mexican people at large, amongst whom I have numbered many friends, and for whom I entertain nothing but kindly feelings and good wishes, and a fervent, and I believe, a well grounded hope, that the present railroad enterprises may be carried on to completion; which combined with the very wise legislation which has been carried into effect since the year 1867, will raise Mexico to its proper place among civilized nations.

"NOMAD."

EPISODES OF LIFE AS IT WAS, IN MEXICO.

CHAPTER I.—"SURRENDER!"

Our party of travellers consisted of nine persons, of whom I was the youngest, not yet fourteen years old, who had landed at the port of Tampico, in the State of Tamaulipas, in the latter part of the year A. D. 1834. The leader of the party, I—M—m, a distant relation of my own, about thirty five years of age, had already resided in the Republic of Mexico for several years, and was now returning to it, from a short visit to his native land, our destination being the mining city of Guanajuato, about 300 miles inland. The only road between these two points, called "El Camino Real" or the Royal Road, was in reality merely a bridle path, and such a one as only mules, donkeys, or horses bred in the country, and accustomed to such feats, could traverse with any degree of safety to their loads or riders, putting the comfort of those last entirely out of the question. Bad as it was, it was the only means of transit for transportation purposes, between the said port, and the interior of the country, every article of merchandise having to be carried on the backs of pack animals. We were mounted on the best saddle beasts that could on the spur of the moment be procured, but they all struck me as being a very sorry lot indeed, and our subsequent experience proved that I was not far wrong in my opinion. Being the youngest of the party, I was mounted on a very diminutive specimen indeed, but one that proved to be quite as gifted with powers of endurance, as the general average of his companions, and as with us the poor brutes got fair treatment and a sufficiency of food, they all improved in condition on the journey, which occupied, I think, a period of about twenty days, our progress being very slow, owing to the number of pack mules we had employed to carry our luggage, and whose days journey was necessarily a very short one. I shall never forget our dreary ride across that pestilential coast range of country; pelting rains by day and night, interspersed with occasional intervals of burning sun-heat, the road where not sandy a perfect quagmire, and on finishing our toilsome day's journey, having to camp out on the bare ground, with no cover-

ing above us but the sky, and with little or nothing to eat, in the bargain. The elder members of the party, doubtless thought they had in these privations, a full and sufficient excuse for indulging to excess, in drinking cognac, of which a barrel full was brought on a mule destined to that purpose alone. Another excuse was, as I remember, the necessity of drinking brandy, to counteract the ill influence of the malarial atmosphere, through which we were travelling. This last though, was certainly ineffectual, as not one of the party escaped a severe attack of malarial fever, on the termination of the journey, while one of them died of it on the road. Young as I was, I was also pressed to partake of the universal medicine, but, fortunately for me, my untutored stomach refused to retain the nauseous draught, and I am thankful to say, the attempt was not repeated. Almost our first shelter under a roof, was at a small rancho, called "El Carriso." The hut was composed of a roof of palm leaves, resting on crochets cut from trees, one end embedded in the ground, at the corners, and interstices filled in with small branches of trees, partially plastered over with mud, a very primitive structure; our beds, the floor, which we occupied in company with the dogs of the family, and a certain lively insect, in most astonishing numbers; still this, bad as it was, was far better than to be sleeping in the open country, as we had been doing, with the rain pattering in ones' face all the live long night; and what was equally comforting, we here luxuriated in a hot meal of "frijoles and tortillas," that is, beans and corn slap jacks. On the following morning one of the party, the one who eventually died before reaching his destination, was unable to proceed, the pack mules with their drivers, were therefore sent on, as well as three or four of the travellers; the others remaining to accompany the sick one, so soon as he should be able to resume the journey. Not long after the luggage had been sent on, a tall, fine looking Mexican, mounted on a spotted horse, handsome and spirited, rode up to the door of the hut. After a short conversation with our leader, who, at that time, was the only one of the party who understood the Spanish language, he dismounted and offered to exchange his handsome charger, for the diminutive specimen of horseflesh, I was journeying on. This exchange was not favored by our leader, and fell to the ground, then the new comer appeared to be suddenly seized with cramps in the stomach, and implored some one to give him some medicine. Our leader very promptly administered to him, quite a number of "Morrison's Pills" saying *sotto voce*, "if you are not sick, I will soon make you so." He then most emphatically advised the man to lie down for a while, which he did, evidently in a state of fright, or what looked very much like it. By this time more than an hour had elapsed since the departure of the luggage party, and the invalid of our party expressed himself able to proceed on the journey. We at once mounted and started. We were still almost within sight of the people of the rancho, when we heard the barking of dogs, and the clatter of horse hoofs behind us. I was the hindmost of the party, and turning to look, saw a man racing after us on horseback, holding out at arms length, a large horseman's pistol, with brass mountings, and bellowing to us something at the top of his voice, which in my ignorance of the Spanish language, I could not understand, but it was evident his intentions were not peaceable. He passed me by, and rode up along side the leader of the party, putting the muzzle of the pistol to his ear. This proceeding brought us all to a stand-still, and everyone handled his arms, even, I took out my little old fashioned pocket pistol, rode up to him, putting the pistol nearly close to his body under the arm, and I can even now recall the contemptuous look, the fellow gave me as he turned his head toward me. Our invalid, who was well

armed, said "Shall I shoot him, M—m? Shall I shoot him?" "No! no!" was the answer, "be quiet, look around you, and see what fellows there are in the woods, leave this fellow to me, I'll manage him." This caused us to do as requested, revealing to our view, several mounted men in the woods, accompanying our line of march, who, evidently did not belong to our party. The colloquy which took place between our leader and assailant, was afterwards explained to me in English by my relation, and was rather amusing.

Robber. "Surrender! give me your money and valuables!"

M—m. "Why should I surrender, I have no money to spare for you?"

Robber. "I have a good pistol, as you see."

M—m. "Well, I have two, much better as you may see," and opening his cloak, showed two magnificent pistols, in a belt around his waist. The act of opening the cloak, I remember well. After this short but animated colloquy, our valiant assailant was very quietly but effectively bound on his horse, I have no doubt much to his astonishment and chagrin, and taken on with us as a prisoner, until we arrived at Tula, where he was delivered over to the Mexican authorities, and where his punishment consisted in his being forcibly enrolled in the Rural Cavalry, a fate he would naturally prefer, to the one usually meted out in such cases, that is, being shot at once. His companions seeing his fate disappeared at once, in the bush. Well it was, for us, because, if they had mustered up courage enough to attack us, we could have made but a sorry defence, as on trying our arms, on the following morning, only two gave fire, mine and one of the leaders, the others, having been so long and foolishly exposed to the rains, throughout the previous days and nights, were utterly unserviceable without undergoing a thorough cleaning. There is now but little doubt on my mind, that the individual whom we left behind us at the rancho, groaning under the effect of the medicine, that had been so cleverly administered to him, was in effect the leader of a party, whose intention it was to plunder us; that his aim when proposing the exchange of horses, as well as his simulated fit of illness, was solely with the intention of delaying us, until by the separation of our party, success would be more probable, but his discomfiture caused the management of the enterprise, to devolve upon a more incompetent person, leading as many other important enterprises, to a complete failure. This was my first, but by no means my last encounter with Mexican "Road Agents," during my residence of many years, in that misgoverned, but lovely land, and we all most certainly had good reason to be thankful for our escape, as we never could understand why we were not attacked by the whole party, at once instead of by one individual only, the others holding aloof.

"NOMAD."

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JOSEPH G. WALTON

Carries on business as a Druggist and Stationer, in Griffith's Block in this city. As to his qualifications for preparing those remedies that cure all diseases: that flesh is heir to, we are not in a position to judge, but as he is a duly certified licentiate, it is quite probable that he knows how. Mr. Walton is "a native of the soil," and we can remember when he belonged to the "cherub" band. He is a great admirer of art and always has a collection of paintings, statuary and other works of art on exhibition. His father was the publisher of the Sherbrooke Gazette, (the first paper published here) from its infancy up to the time of his death in 1875. Mr. Walton knows how to "paddle his own canoe," literally, as well as figuratively, and is well up in the use of the rod and rifle. He is a close observer and has contributed valuable information through *Forest and Stream* on matters of interest to the sportsman and naturalist. Like Paddy's parrot, "he hasn't much to say; but he's a devil to think." His sport with rod and gun in the lake Megantic region would rather surprise the present amateur sportsman. One of the best meals we ever partook of, was one night on the Upper Spider, when Ball (the guide) and myself, demolished two frying pan-fuls of moose steak, the antlered porter of which steak, had come within reach of Mr. Walton's rifle, the previous night, and had fallen a victim of a curiosity to ascertain why the moon gave two lights on that particular night.

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