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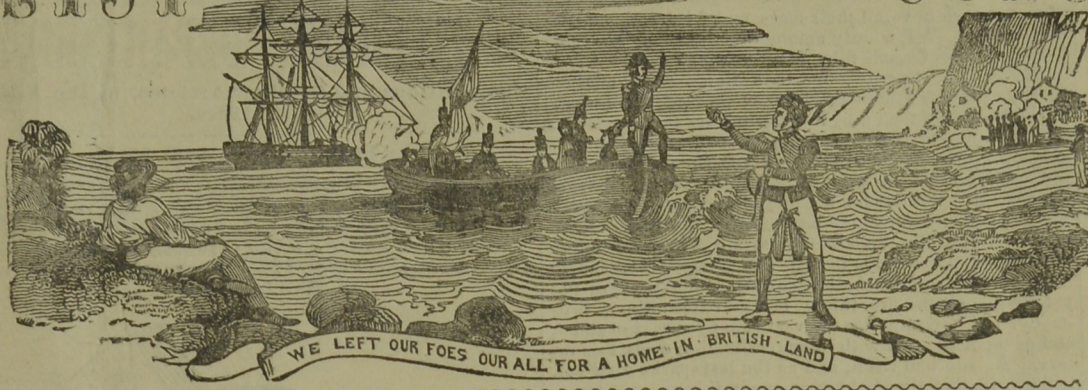
ST. JOHN, N. B.

TERMS { 15s. PER ANNUM, PAYABLE IN ADVANCE / £1 AT THE EXPIRATION OF THE YEAR.

Vol. 2, No. 25.

JUNE 25, 1847.

THE FORMER SERIES CONTAINED THREE VOLUMES AND THIRTY ONE NUMBERS.



BALLADS OF THE RHINE.

BY ANDREW L. PICKEN.

DUSSELDORF.—“YERGIN MEIN RIGHT.”

Out on the waves, far out, my seabird! thou and I Will rock ourselves in dreams of faithful Germany— I framed thee of the sandal tree—my slight and silvery boat, That thou might'st shine amid the green, like lily leaves afloat. I spread a sail of finest woof, scarce fit to hold the breeze, That thou might'st be, my lone canoe, the darling of the seas. There are no lookers on, my friend, but the free clouds of the sky. So out upon the far blue waves, my seabird! thou and I, Come, all ye fair and yellow locked, ye children of the Goth, Ye restless and disdained of Sleep, yet more abhorred of Sloth; Come with your iron sinews and your broad and dauntless brows, Like argosies that quell the waves 'neath their imperial prows, Down the good old German highway, whence our hosts went forth to Rome, Come with your harvest burthen and be welcome where ye come.

At Dusseldorf is many a Haulf, where the golden bush hangs out, But ye, the wine pressers, know well the wily bait to scout; The “good wine needs no bush,” as your old “mortsiens” wont to say, “Let the juicy monk smack first, I trow the nuns wont turn away. Oh! merry market crowds, as in a picture, still I see Your locks like mellow waving corn, smile dimpling like the sea.

Old Father Teniers fondly loved your summer greenerie, The low and dozing homestead and the bourging threshold tree; With the labyrinth of roses and the dark and dreamy well, And the jollin of the vineyard, and the merry carlew bell; And the babes a-sporting round his knee—O! Bauer of Oberland, The old man was a child again amid your mountain band.

And Luther, the uncanonized, the blessed then as now, That pored upon the Holy Writ with a sunbeam on his brow; For you he wrenched the tares up, and made clear the truthful wells, ‘Mid the crashing of the graven things and the howling of the cells. The echo of his fearless voice still haunts your crowned hills, And the blessings of his gentle heart around ye play like rills.

There's a music in your homely speech, a music of the heart, That keepeth green the memory of golden-lyred Mozart. Whether like falling water through the brown vine leaves its sings, Or floats 'neath the cathedral arch on soft angelic wings! The haliest of your household gods while hoary Hartz shall stand, The “rare old Minnesinger,” shall abide within the land.

The sword is now a ploughshare, but the storied Rhine can tell, When the serried Schwartz-reiters came down, the work went brave and well; When the lances of Bavaria flashed, like lightning from the cloud, And Almaine from her outraged heart pronounced her curse aloud. Where then stood ye—oh! stalwart and broad breasted men of Rhine— In the first dread line of battle with the boldest of the line.

[In our last, by an oversight, we commenced with the third chapter of this work instead of the first. Our subscribers will please read this chapter, and the next, and then re-peruse the chapters published in our last.—Ed.]

SCENES IN THE WILDS OF MEXICO.*

CAYETANO THE CONTRABANDISTA.

CHAPTER I.

The sea-coast of Mexico has at all times been infested with smugglers. This mode of obtaining a livelihood is not there, as in Europe, monopolised by a few audacious adventurers. According to the more or less impoverished state of the finances, every government officer is more or less busied in indemnifying himself at the expense of the state, because the state does not pay him. The soldiers loudly demand their pay, the civilians join the soldiers. The state, as may be supposed, turns a deaf ear, and each then endeavours to

* Mexico has at all times been an interesting country to the European; at the present time people are naturally still more curious to learn all they can about its inhabitants and their manners. In the graphic ‘Souvenirs des Cotes de l’Ocean Pacifique’ of M. Gabriel Ferry, there are some deeply interesting pictures of the modes of existence of this wild people. Without waiting for their entire publication, we propose to offer our readers an abridgement of one of these striking passages of Mexican life, and should it be relished, to follow it up with two or three more.—O. Y.

find some resource. The administrator of the Customs gives full power to the searchers (vistas), the searchers to the custom-house officers, these to the porters of the administration, and the latter are assisted by all who can lift a weight, manage a boat, or, in case of necessity, use a dagger. Then, according to the humour of the President of the Republic, or the severity of the laws promulgated, smuggling goes on either in the open day or under cover of the night, in the sea ports or on the isolated coasts; but, whether far or near, every one lends a helping hand. It may easily be conceived, therefore, that in the dull season of the pearl and tortoiseshell fishery, the divers and harpooners who follow those trades form valuable auxiliaries to the smugglers. As a natural consequence of the poverty of the treasury, whilst the government officers smuggle, soldiers—even officers—join the highway robbers. Robbery is not the sole profession of these highwaymen (salteador de camino). They are fathers of families, often protected by the alcade of their village, and blessed by their priest; men who disdain to set forth unless their spies have announced some rich prey. After having pitilessly massacred a traveller who attempted to resist, or treated with exquisite urbanity one who quietly allowed himself to be despoiled, they regain their village; not forgetting, in the division of the booty, the inn-keeper who sent them mysterious advice, the alcade who signed their permission to carry arms, and the priest who gave them absolution. Such is the singular toleration of opinion, that robbers and smugglers do not in Mexico live apart from society, or form a distinct caste, possessing its own peculiar customs and regulations. Whoever does not see them at work, is ignorant of what is distinctive in their modes of life. I hardly expected, I must confess, ever to find myself in the position necessary to complete my remarks on this subject, when a chance meeting at Hermosillo procured me the opportunity of closely witnessing this new species of smuggling. I had reached Hermosillo some time before the festivities of Christmas, and had spent a week in the city without being able to send out all the letters with which I had been loaded at Guaymas. One evening, on examining them for the next day's distribution, the direction of one of them struck me. They were not sufficiently numerous to prevent my perfectly remembering those who had entrusted me with them; and yet that one, I own, completely baffled my memory: there was on it but these words, ‘Al Señor Don Cayetano.’ I called up my host, whom I had chosen because he was a Chinese, knowing the reputation of his countrymen as barbers and cooks; from him I hoped to obtain some information respecting this Don Cayetano.

‘I only know him,’ said the Chinese to me, ‘from often buying of him caymans’ eggs and sharks’ fins of which I am very fond, and which you shall eat some day, if Don Cayetano take a fancy to turn on our lagoons, or a row out to sea. If you desire it, señor, I will take upon myself to get this letter delivered to him.’

I accepted with pleasure. ‘And you know no more concerning him?’ ‘Nothing,’ said the Chinese, ‘except a peculiarity I have heard spoken of. People maintain that Don Cayetano cannot hear unmoved the sound of the Cerro de la Campana (the Hill of the Bell);* this sound irritates him, and when he is irritated he is—he is very fiery! This is all I know, señor.’

The Chinese uttered these last words like a man determined to say no more, and I dismissed him. Some days afterwards, chance brought me into the company of the individual in question, and under the following circumstances. The town of Pitic possesses nothing in the way of natural curiosities but the Cerro de la Campana, of which the Chinese had spoken to me. I had been to visit the Cerro; I had aroused some sleeping echoes, but soon found this pleasure rather wearisome, and again looked towards the city. The day was closing, and the hills, with which the town is surrounded, were gradually losing their azure tint. It was the hour at which the freshness of evening succeeds the burning heat of the day. When I had ascended the height the streets were deserted, and the dried-up bed of the Rio San Miguel was silent. At the moment I am now speaking of, Hermosillo was beginning to get animated; the preparations for the Christmas festivities were commencing. Fuses described fiery circles in the air, the reddish glow of the cesinous wood burning on iron tripods already lighted up some parts of the river, the cries of the vendors of infusions of rose-water and tamarinds were heard, mingled with the hum of the crowd, the clash of the castanets, and the tinkle of the mandolins. The city was emerging from the lethargic torpor in which it had been plunged since morning.

As I descended the Cerro, in passing through a neighbouring street a sound of money proceeding from a low small house led me to suspect that I was probably near some gambling-house. I was able to distinguish, between the bars of wood which protected the windows, a green cloth, and gamblers seated silently round an oval table. Resolved to kill the time before supper, I entered the house. All the gamblers were occupied by a coup, which appeared highly interesting—no one remarked my arrival; I was, therefore, able to observe at my ease. Two candles, each burning under a glass shade, and round which fluttered myriads of night moths, threw their unsteady light on about thirty people assembled in the room which I had entered. Every physiognomy presented the same expression of impossibility. Spectators and gamblers smoked with equal calmness. I should say almost equal dignity. There was between them but one difference,—that of costume. There were representatives of every class of Mexican society; the gallery was crowded with individuals who wrapped their pieces of coarse calico around them with an air of great majesty, although their chests and arms were bare; most of them had long and crooked scars, received in duels with the knife; and presenting from under unkempt, uncultivated locks of dark hair, countenances to make any honest man shudder to look at.

At the moment I entered, the attention of the gallery was concentrated on two gamblers. One was thin and sickly-looking, and wore a straw hat and a jacket of unbleached linen; the other, tall and muscular, built like an athlete, was covered, in spite of the heat, with a cloak trimmed with wide gold lace; his head was wrapped in a checked handkerchief, the ends of which, hanging from under a hat of

*The Cerro de la Campana is a somewhat steep hill, situated at the extremity of the city, and towering above the houses, behind which it rears itself. The summit of the Cerro is crowned with enormous blocks of stone, which emit, at the slightest shocks, a clear and metallic sound like that of an ordinary bell, the vibrations of which can be heard a great distance off, according to the direction of the wind.

Spanish wool, fell over his shoulders like the Andalusian re- villa. The former turned his back to me, and I could not see his physiognomy; the latter, seated opposite the door, had tolerably regular features, disfigured by a scar, which reached from the brow over the cheek down to the chin.

‘Allow me, señor senador,’ said the scarred gambler, stretching out his hand to add a pile of piasters to these he had put on a card; ‘with your permission, I will deal myself.’ ‘With pleasure, my son,’ said the individual I could not see; ‘I am convinced that you will bring me luck.’

And so saying, he put the pack of cards which he held into his adversary's hand. The latter solemnly shuffled the cards; but though his countenance was impassible, his hands appeared to shake.

‘You surely are not afraid?’ asked the senator. At the word afraid, a smile of incredulity lighted up the sinister faces in the gallery.

‘Not I,’ replied the athlete, seeking in vain to conceal his emotion; ‘but some one was amusing himself a little while ago by striking the Cerro, and my nerves are horribly irritated every time I hear that infernal music!’

This declaration appeared to produce a certain sensation upon the whole assembly, for there was soon an empty space round the gambler, who gazed about him with a look of defiance, and soon sunk again into his apparent calmness. I felt that this man could be no other than the purveyor of the caymans’ eggs and sharks’ fins which the Chinese had promised me; in a word, Cayetano himself. As to this delicacy of nerves in a man of herculean build and strength, it could only be, I thought, either a ridiculous affectation, or something really awful, like the homicidal influence of the sirocco or levante in certain parts of Andalusia.

‘Here is the ace of clubs for you, señor senador—I have lost,’ said Cayetano; and he took up again the cigarette which he had laid down on the green cloth, with as much coolness as if he had been perfectly indifferent to the loss. He was about to rise, when the senator passed over to him a handful of piasters without counting them, saying,—

‘Here is something to try for better luck with; don't make yourself uneasy, but go on.’

Cayetano counted the piasters with the most scrupulous attention. ‘My dear fellow,’ said the other, ‘don't stop to count!’

‘I beg your pardon, señor senador; it interests me more than you are aware.’

Cayetano appeared to be reflecting deeply, though counting all the time. ‘Ah, true! you are thinking how you shall discharge the debt,’ added the senator.

‘I have calculated, señor senador, that I brought with me fifteen piasters; that here are twenty-two which you have just give me; and that by paying you nothing I have now seven piasters.’

At these words a laugh of approbation echoed through the room, the senator partaking of the general hilarity in a very forced manner. Cayetano quietly got up, put the piasters in the pockets of his velvet calzonerias, and went out very well satisfied with his evening. The senator, for he was one, as he followed him with a mystified air, turned his face towards me, and I then remembered to have seen him at Mexico in the exercise of his functions. It is well known that every federal state has its own congress and senate, and that it is the delegates of these two houses who compose, in the capital of the republic what is called the sovereign congress.

Don Urbano (I shall call him so) blushed on perceiving me, for he was not without some acquaintance with our ideas of European dignity. He arose quickly, and advanced towards me.

‘These are my electors,’ said he, as a sort of excuse, after the usual compliments had passed between us.

‘Ah, these are your electors!’ said I, looking round with astonishment at the gawflies faces surrounding us; ‘they look very respectable!’

‘No doubt, for they are the most numerous,’ replied Don Urbano.

‘Which does not prevent you from winning their money?’ ‘What would you have?’ said the senator; ‘one must do something for one's constituents. Perhaps you do not know that a formidable rival disputes with me the honour of representing the state at the sovereign congress?’

He talked to me some little time longer about his political prospects; then having, with Mexican courtesy, placed himself at my disposal, he proposed a walk about the town, and we went out. The esplanade above the Rio San Miguel, and the dried-up bed of the river itself, presented a very animated scene. I have already mentioned that the Christmas festivities were about to begin. Cabins of foliage were erected at short distances, the fires burning on iron tripods flickered to and fro, lightning up pyramids of fruits and scaffolds of refreshing drinks of every colour. A crowd, in singular costumes brightened by the red flame of resinous wood, flocked on all sides. In one place, Creoles danced licentious fandangos to the sound of castanets and mandolins. Further on, some Indians executed their lugubrious dances to the sound of calabashes full of pebbles, and the melancholy cadences of their singers, abruptly broken by their various war-cries; in the midst of the joyous tumult of the Creole dancers, this funeral melody seemed like the lament of the vanquished, and the war-cries the accents of rebellion extorted by the spirit of revenge which never dies in the hearts of these primitive nations. I communicated these reflections to Don Urbano.

‘The melancholy remains that you see,’ he replied, ‘of nations once formidable, have no thoughts of reconquering an independence of which even their fathers had no remembrance. You could form no idea of the Indian; in all the pride of his savage existence, unless you saw the Papagos Indians; unfortunately, they are also celebrating their Christmas festival, and have not left their rejoicings for ours.’

‘What,’ said I, ‘are they then Christians?’

‘No; but by a singular coincidence, their creed places the birth of the sun on the same day as we do the birth of our saviour. I am about to be present at their festival with a foreigner, and if you like to join us I will present him to you; he will be delighted to make your acquaintance. I have obtained a safe conduct from a Papago chief, and we shall have a guide whom we can trust.’

This invitation excited my curiosity, and I accepted with delight. It was therefore, settled that the senator and his companion should come and fetch me the next day, the 21st of December. We then separated, and I returned home.

The next day at sunrise I was ready to mount, when three horsemen stopped at my door. The first was the senator,

the second the stranger, whom he presented as an Englishman; and in the third I recognised the scarred gambler of the previous day. This was the guide who was to conduct us. One peculiarity struck me in the stranger; that he should speak French very badly and murder Spanish in an incredible manner, I thought perfectly natural. There never was anything more diverting than the mistakes he made, and at which he was the first to laugh most heartily. What had surprised me were his dark complexion, and southern manners, which announced a long residence in countries, the language of which the Englishman appeared completely ignorant.

We took the road to the lagoons. Firmly seated on a fine horse of almost unparalleled vigor, which champed its bit and scattered flakes of foam to the wind our guide walked on a little way before us.

‘Did you know this man before?’ I asked the senator. ‘The whole country knows him,’ replied Don Urbano; ‘he is by trade a turtle fisher, and has acquaintances everywhere, for it is through him that I obtained the safe conduct, or rather the permission, to be present at the ceremony which we shall this night witness among the Papagos, with whom we are at peace. I should have too hard a task if it were to enumerate all his accomplishments; mysteriously added the senator; ‘and, moreover, he is an influential elector!’

This was all in all to Don Urbano, and I no longer wondered at the docility with which the ambitious senator had, on the previous day, complied with the cavalier exactions of his adversary.

The road from Hermosillo to the isle of Tiburon, lies along the banks of the Rio San Miguel. This river varies according to the season, and is either a small streamlet of water, which flows almost unperceived in its vast bed, or an impetuous sea, which this bed can no longer contain, and which disgorges its sily waters into vast lagoons before feeding a lake which it meets in its course. Amongst these lagoons, some are like a crystal mirror, others are concealed by tall reeds, others again covered with a thick coating of green weeds, which gives a deceptive appearance of solidity to their moveable surface. A canopy of vapor always floats over these marshes above the reeds, which are forever trembling, either from the breath of the moist air or from the efforts of the caymans, who take their prodigious sport in the mud. Whilst daylight lasts, all is silent and deserted; but when the sun begins to sink, when the low hills which surround these stagnant waters gradually become hidden in the mist which arises from their bosom, a few animals appear from time to time, a wild horse bounds amid the shrubs; a jaguar advances crouching to seize its prey; a stag, driven by thirst, timidly ventures to the brink of these drowned savannahs, scenting the musk like odour of the alligators, then, with watchful eye and outstretched ear, quenches his thirst, letting fall from its mouth at the least noisè drops of water which sparkle in the oblique rays of the sun. Flights of screeching birds as yet along disturb the silence of these solitudes; but, at the fall of night, strange shapes appear on the surface of these limpid streams, or rise and break the thick coating of these slimy lakes; fearful sounds issue from these green reed jungles; these sounds sometimes similar to the cries of new born infants, at others, like the bellowing of furious bulls, according as the caymans express their loves, their sorrows or their rage, and mingled with the horrible rattling of these hideous reptiles’ jaws, as they answer or defy one another. On advancing still further, an imposing voice drowns these strange concerts—it is the voice of the ocean breaking against the rocky shore.

We were traversing a natural road at some distance above these drowned lands, and Cayetano continued to precede us at some little distance, without taking any part in the conversation; suddenly I saw him turn his horse, and rapidly descend the steep bank of the road.

‘What is he going to do?’ I asked the senator.

Don Urbano first looked attentively at the lagoons, and then answered,—

‘Do you see out there at some distance from the furthest lagoon a little field of reeds? These reeds move, and if I am not mistaken it is not the wind that shakes them, but some alligator who lies concealed there, and Cayetano wishes to give him chase.’

The road Cayetano followed at first appeared to contradict this assertion, for instead of taking the direction of the reeds, he took the diagonally opposite road; suddenly he turned sharply off to the left, and galloped in a direct line towards the spot pointed out by the senator. To the cry which he at the same moment uttered, the reply was a grunt of rage, and an enormous cayman hastened, as quickly as his unwieldy structure would permit, towards the lagoon, of which his enemy wanted to intercept the road. The scaly and blackish hue of the reptile was almost entirely covered with thick mud, interspersed here and there with marsh weeds. In its flight it passed within a dozen feet of Cayetano's horse; the noble animal reared with terror, and endeavored to throw himself on one side; but he had to deal with a rough rider; the spur turned him into the right road, and at the same instant the lasso of plaited leather, which Cayetano whirled in the air, fell on the cayman. The alligator opened an immense jaw, which seemed armed with stakes rather than teeth, and his frightful roar made our horses start; the pressure of the slip knot violently closed the open jaw, and stifled the roar in his throat with a gurgling sound. For an instant the hideous reptile hesitated whether he should rush upon his enemy or pull towards the water. Fear counselled the latter plan; but Cayetano had secured the end of his lasso three times round the high pommel of his saddle, and the force of the horse balanced that of the cayman. For a few minutes the two animals made prodigious efforts in contrary ways. The alligator furiously dug his claws into the soft ground which the horse's hoofs rutted by long slides. There was a moment of silence, during which we heard nothing but the sonorous noise of the iron spurs against the horse's sides, and the clash of the scales on the cayman's tail, with which it lashed and crushed the surrounding reeds. Twice an irresistible pull dragged the former on his two hind feet, and twice in his turn the cayman, violently drawn back, showed his belly, which terror and rage had made a dark violet. At last a third and more furious effort lifted up the horse a third time, and he was about to fall on his rider when the bellyband gave way with a loud noise. There was an end of Cayetano, whom his enemy was about to drag away with the saddle, without our being able to lend him any assistance. The senator turned pale at the sight of the danger his influential elector ran; I cried out; but as the saddle was slipping from under him, Cayetano seized the mane of his horse, lifted himself on his wrists like the riders of our amphitheatres, and by a