

Literature, &c.

British Magazines for April.

Blackwood's Magazine.

A TORNADO.

[From an article in this periodical, entitled "Two Nights in Southern Mexico," we take the following graphic account of a fearful hurricane and deluge, peculiar to that country, in which the narrator and a friend had a very narrow escape from being swept away by the torrent.]

"We had not eaten a dozen mouthfuls when we saw a man running down the hill with a branch in each hand. As soon as he appeared, a number of the Mexicans left their occupations, and hurried to meet him.

"*¡Siete horas!*" shouted the man. "Seven hours and no more!"

"No more than seven hours!" echoed the Tzapotecs, in tones of the wildest terror and alarm. "*La Santísima nos guarde.*" It will take more than ten to reach the village."

"What's all that about?" said I, with my mouth full to Rowley.

"Don't know—some of their Indian tricks, I suppose."

"*Que es esto?*" asked I carelessly. "What is the matter?"

"*Que es esto?*" repeated an old Tzapotecan, with long grey hair curling from under his sombrero, and a withered but finely marked countenance. "*Las aguas. El ouracan.* In seven hours the deluge and the hurricane."

"*Vamos, por la Santísima!* For the blessed Virgin's sake let us be gone!" cried a dozen of Mexicans pushing two green boughs into our very faces.

"What are those branches?"

"From the tempest tree—the prophet of the storm," was the reply.

And Tzapotecs and women, arrieros and servants, ran about in the utmost terror and confusion, with cries of "*Vamos, paso redoblado!*" Off with us, or we are all lost, man and beast," and saddling, packing, and scrambling on their mules. And before Rowley and I knew where we were, they tore us away from our iguano and coffee, and hoisted and pushed us into our saddles. Such a scene of bustle and desperate hurry I never beheld. The place where the encampment had been was alive with men and women, horses and mules, shouting, shrieking and talking, neighing and kicking; but with all the confusion there was little time lost, and in less than three minutes from the first alarm being given, we were scampering away over stock and stone, in a long, wild, irregular sort of train.

The rapidity and excitement of our ride seemed to have the effect of calming our various sufferings, or of making us forget them; and we soon thought no more of the fever, or of stings or mosquito bites. It was a ride for life or death, and our horses stepped out as if they knew how much depended on their exertions.

We had now ridden a good five or six leagues and began to think we had escaped the *aguas* or deluge, of which the prospect had so terrified our friends the Tzapotecs. Rowley calculated, as he went puffing and grumbling along that it would do any harm to let our beasts draw breath for a minute or two. The scrambling and constant change of pace rendered necessary by the nature of the road, or rather track, that we followed, was certainly dreadfully fatiguing both to man and beast. As for conversation it was out of the question. We had plenty to do to avoid getting our necks broken, or our teeth knocked out, as we struggled along, up and down barrancas, through marshes and thickets, over rocks and fallen trees, and through mimosa and bushes laced and twined together with thorns and creeping plants—all of which would have been beautiful in a picture, but was most infernally unpoetical in reality.

"*Vamos, por la Santísima Madre, vamos!*" yelled our guides, and the cry was taken up by the Mexicans, in a shrill wild tone that jarred strangely upon our ears, and made the horses start and strain forward. Hurra! on we go, through thorns and bushes, which scratch and flog us, and tear our clothes to rags. We shall be naked if this lasts long. It is a regular race.

In front the two guides, stopping, nodding, bowing, crouching down, first to one side, and then to the other, like a couple of mandarins or Indian idols—behind them a Tzapotecan in his picturesque capa, then the women, then more Tzapotecs. There is little thought about precedence or ceremony; and Rowley and I, having been in the least hurry to start, find ourselves bringing up the rear of the whole column.

"*Vamos, por la Santísima, Las aguas, las aguas!*" is again yelled by twenty voices. Hang the tools! Can't they be quiet with their eternal *vamos*? We can have barely two leagues more to go to reach the *rancho*, or village, they were talking of, and appearances are not as yet very alarming. It is getting rather thick to be sure; but that's nothing, only the exaltations from the swamp, for we are again, approaching one of those cursed swamps and can hear the music of the alligators and bullfrogs. There they are, the beauties; a couple of them are taking a peep at us, sticking their elegant heads and long delicate snouts out of the slime and mud. The neighbourhood is none of the best; but luckily the path is firm and good, carefully made evidently by Indian hands. None but Indians could live and labour and travel habitually, in such a pestilential atmosphere. Thank God! we are out of it at last. Again on firm forest ground, amidst the

magnificent monotony of the eternal palms and mahogany trees.

"*Misericordia, misericordia. Audi nos peccadores. Misericordia, las aguas!*" suddenly screamed and exclaimed the Mexicans in various intonations of terror and despair. We looked around us. What can be the matter? We see nothing. Nothing, except that from just behind those two mountains, which project like mighty promontories into the valley, a cloud is beginning to rise. "What is it? What is wrong?" A dozen voices answered us—

"*Por la Santa Virgen*, for the holy Virgin's sake, on, on! We have still two leagues to go, and in one hour comes the flood."

And they recommenced their howling, yelling chorus of "*Misericordia! Audi nos peccadores!*" and "*Santísima Virgen!*" and "*Todos santos y angeles!*"

"Are the fellows mad?" shouted Rowley. "What if the water does come? It won't swallow you. A ducking more or less is no such great matter. You are not made of sugar or salt. Many's the drenching I've had in the States, and none the worse for it. Yet our rains are no child's play, neither."

On looking round us, however, we were involuntarily struck with the sudden change in the appearance of the heavens. The usual golden black blue colour of the sky was gone, and had been replaced by a dull gloomy grey. The quality of the air appeared also to have changed; it was neither very warm nor very cold, but it had lost its lightness and elasticity, and seemed to oppress and weigh us down. Presently we saw the dark cloud rise gradually from behind the hills, completely clearing their summits, and then sweeping along until it hung over the valley, in form and appearance like some monstrous night-moth, resting the tips of its enormous wings on the mountains on either side. To our right we still saw the roofs and walls of Quidricovi, apparently at a very short distance.

"Why not go to Quidricovi?" shouted I to the guides, "we cannot be far off."

"More than five leagues," answered the men, shaking their heads and looking anxiously at the huge moth, which was still creeping and crawling on, each moment darker and more threatening. It was like some frightful monster, or the fabled Kraken, working itself along by its claws, which were struck deep into the mountain-wall on either side of its line of progress, and casting its hideous shadow over hill and dale, forest and valley, clothing them in gloom and darkness. To our right hand and behind us, the mountains were still of a glowing golden red, lighted up by the sun, but to the left and in our front all was black and dark. With the same glance we beheld the deepest gloom and the brightest day, meeting each other but not blending. It was a strange and ominous sight.

Ominous enough; and the brute creation seem to feel it as well as ourselves. The chattering parrots, the hopping, gibbering quarrelsome apes, all the birds and beasts, scream and cry and flutter and spring about, as though seeking a refuge from some impending danger. Even our horses begin to tremble and groan—refuse to go on, start and snort. The whole animal world is in commotion, as if seized with an overwhelming panic. The forest is teeming with inhabitants. Whence come they, all those living things? On every side is heard the howling and snarling of beasts—the frightened cries and chirpings of birds. The vultures and turkey buzzards, that a few minutes before were circling high in the air, are now screaming amidst the branches of the mahogany trees; every creature that has life is running, flying—apes and tigers, birds and creeping things.

"*Vamos por la Santísima. On! or we are all lost!*"

And we ride, we rush along—neither masses of rock, nor fallen trees, nor thorns and brambles, check our wild career. Over every thing we go, leaping, scrambling, plunging, riding like desperate men, flying from a danger of which the nature is not clearly defined, but which we feel to be great and imminent. It is a frightful terror striking foe, that huge night moth, which comes ever nearer, growing each moment bigger and blacker. Looking behind us, we catch one last glimpse of the red and bloodshot sun, which the next instant disappears behind the edge of the mighty cloud.

Still we push on. Hosts of tigers and monkeys, both large and small, and squirrels and jackals, come close up to us as if seeking shelter, and then finding none, retreat howling into the forest. There is not a breath of air stirring,—yet all nature—plants and trees, men and beasts—seem to quiver, and tremble with apprehension. Our horses pant and groan as they bound along with dilated nostrils and glaring eyes, trembling in every limb, sweating at every pore, half wild with terror; giving springs and leaps that more resemble those of a hunted tiger than of a horse.

The prayer and exclamations of the terrified Mexicans, continued without intermission, whispered and shrieked and groaned in every variety of intonation. The earthy hue of intense terror was upon every countenance. For some moments a death like stillness, an unnatural calm reigned around us: it was as though the elements were holding in their breath, and collecting their energies for some mighty outbreak. Then came a low indistinct moaning sound, that seemed to issue from the bowels of the earth. The warning was a significant one.

"Halt! stop!" shouted we to the guides. "Stop! and let us seek shelter from the storm."

"On! for God's sake, on! or we are lost," was the reply.

Thank Heaven! the path is getting wider—we come to a descent—they are leading us out

of the forest. If the storm had come on while we were among the trees, we might be crushed to death by the falling branches. We are close to a barranca.

"*¡Alerto, Alerto!*" shrieked the Mexicans. "*¡Madre de Dios, Dios, Dios!*"

And well might they call to God for help in that awful moment. The gigantic night moth gaped and shot forth tongues of fire—a ghastly white flame, that contrasted strangely and horribly with the dense black cloud from which it issued. There was a peal of thunder that seemed to shake the earth, then a pause during which nothing was heard but the panting of our horses as they dashed across the barranca, and began straining up the steep side of a knoll or hillock. The cloud again opened: for a second every thing was lighted up. Another thunder clap, and then, as though the gates of its prison had been suddenly burst open, the tempest came forth in its might and fury, breaking, crushing, and sweeping away all that opposed it. The trees of the forest staggered and tottered for a moment, as if making an effort to bear up against the storm; but it was in vain: the next instant, with a report like that of ten thousand cannon, whole acres of mighty trees were snapped off, their branches shivered their roots torn up; it was no longer a forest but a chaos, an ocean of boughs and tree trunks that were tossed about like the waves of the sea, or thrown into the air like straws. The atmosphere was darkened with dust, and leaves, and branches.

"God be merciful to us! Rowley! where are ye?—No answer. What is become of them all?"

A second blast more furious than the first. Can the mountains resist it? will they stand? By the Almighty! they do not. The earth trembles; the hillock, on the lee side of which we are, rocks and shakes; and the air grows thick and suffocating—full of dust and saltpetre and sulphur. We are like to choke. All around is as dark as night. We can see nothing, hear nothing, but the howling of the hurricane, and the thunder and rattle of falling trees and shivered branches.

Suddenly the hurricane ceases, and all is hushed; but so suddenly that the change is startling and unnatural. No sound is audible save the creaking and moaning of the trees with which the ground is cumbered. It is like a sudden pause in a battle, when the roar of the cannon and clang of charging squadrons cease, and nought is heard but the groaning of the wounded, the agonized sobs and gasps of the dying.

The report of a pistol is heard; then another a third, hundreds, thousands of them. It is the *las aguas*; the shots are drops of rain; but such drops! each as big as a hen's egg. They strike with the force of enormous hailstones—stunning and blinding us. The next moment there is no distinction of drops, the windows of heaven are opened; it is no longer rain nor flood, but a sea, a cataract, a Niagara. The hillock on which I am standing, undermined by the waters, gives way and crumbles under me; in ten seconds' time I find myself in the barranca, which is converted into a river, off my horse, which is gone I know not whither. The only person I see near me is Rowley, also dismounted and struggling against the stream, which is already up to our waists, and sweeps along with its huge branches and entire trees, that threaten each moment to carry us away with them, or to crush us against the rocks. We avoid these dangers, God knows how, make violent efforts to stem the torrent and gain the side of the barranca; although, even should we succeed, it is so steep that we can scarcely hope to climb it without assistance. And whence is that assistance to come? Of the Mexicans we see or hear nothing. They are doubtless all drowned or dashed to pieces. They were higher up on the hillock than we were, must consequently have been swept down with more force, and were probably carried away by the torrent. Nor can we hope for a better fate. Wearied by our ride, weakened by the fever and sufferings of the preceding night, we are in no condition to strive much longer with the ferocious elements. For one step that we gain, we lose two. The waters rise; already they are nearly up to our armpits. It is in vain to resist any longer. Our fate is sealed.

"Rowley, all is over—let us die like men. God have mercy on our souls!"

Rowley was a few paces higher up to barranca. He made me no answer, but looked at me with a calm, cold, and yet somewhat regretful smile upon his countenance. Then all at once he ceased the efforts he was making to resist the stream and gain the bank, folded his arms on his breast and gave a look up and around him, as though to bid farewell to the world he was about to leave. The current was sweeping him rapidly down towards me, when suddenly a wild hurra burst from his lips, and he recommenced his struggles against the waters, striving violently to retain a footing on the slippery, uneven bed of the stream.

"*Tenga, Tenga,*" screamed a dozen voices that seemed to proceed from spirits of the air, and at the same moment something whistled about my ears and struck me a smart blow across the face. With the instinct of a drowning man, I clutched the *lasso* that had been thrown to me. Rowley was at my elbow and seized it also. It was immediately drawn tight, and by its aid we gained the bank, and began ascending the side of the barranca, composed of rugged, declivitous rocks, affording but scanty foot hold. God grant the *lasso* may prove tough! The strain on it is fearful. Rowley is a good fifteen stone, and I am no feather; and in some parts of our perilous ascent the rocks are almost as perpendicular and smooth as a wall of masonry, and we are obliged to cling with our whole weight to the *lasso*, which seems to stretch, and crack, and grow

visibly thinner. Nothing but a strip of twisted cow-hide between us and a frightful agonizing death on the sharp rocks and in the foaming waters below. But the *lasso* holds good, and now the chief peril is past; we get some sort of footing—a point of rock, or a tree-root to clutch at. Another strain upon this ragged slope of granite, another pull at the *lasso*; a leap, a last violent effort, and—*Viva!*—we are seized under the arms, dragged up, held upon our feet for a moment, and then—we sink exhausted to the ground in the midst of the Tzapotecs, mules, arrieros, guides, and women, who are sheltered from the storm in a sort of natural cave.

At the moment at which the hillock had given way under Rowley and myself, who were a short distance in the rear of the party, the Mexicans had succeeded in attaining firm footing on a broad rocky ledge, a shelf of the precipice that flanked the barranca. Upon this ledge, which gradually widened into a platform, they found themselves in safety under some projecting crags that sheltered them completely from the tempest. Thence they looked down upon the barranca, where they descried Rowley and myself struggling for our lives in the roaring torrent; and thence, by knotting several *lassos* together, they were able to give us the opportune aid which had rescued us from our desperate situation. But whether this aid had come soon enough to save our lives was still a question, or at least for some time appeared to be so. The life seemed driven out of our bodies by all we had gone through: we were unable to move a finger, and lay helpless and motionless, with only a glimmering indistinct perception, not amounting to consciousness of what was going on around us. Fatigue, the fever, the immersion in cold water, when reeking with perspiration, the sufferings of all kinds we had endured in the course of the last twenty hours, had completely exhausted and broken us down.

The storm did not last long in its violence, but swept onwards, leaving a broad track of desolation behind it. The Mexicans recommenced their journey, with the exception of four or five who remained with us and our arrieros and servants.

[From an article on the efficiency and prowess of the British Fleet, we take the first paragraph, descriptive of]

A LINE OF BATTLE SHIP.

Were the question proposed to us, What is the most extraordinary, complete, and effective instance of skill, contrivance, science, and power, ever combined by man? we would unhesitatingly answer, an English line-of-battle ship. Take the model of a 120 gun ship—large as it may be for a floating body, its space is not great. For example, it is not half the ordinary size of a nobleman's mansion; yet that ship carries a thousand men with conveniences, and lodges them day and night, with sufficient room for the necessary distinctions of obedience and command—has separate apartments for the admiral and the captain, for the different ranks of officers, and even for the different ranks of seamen—separate portions below decks for the sleeping of the crew, the dining of the officers, and the receptacle for the sick and wounded. Those thousand men are to be fed three times a day, and provisions for four months are to be stowed. One hundred and twenty cannon, some of them of the heaviest metal, are to be carried; and room is to be found for all the weight of shot and quantities of powder, with other missiles, rockets, and signal fires, necessary for service. Besides this, room is to be provided for the stowage of fresh rigging, sails, ropes, cables, and yards, to replace those lost by accident, battle, or wear and tear. Besides, this, too, there is to be provision for the hospital. So far for the mere necessities of the ship. Then we are to regard the science; for nothing can be more essential for the skill and the instruments of the navigator, as nothing can be more fatal than a scientific error, or a false calculation, or the remission of vigilance. We shall do no more than allude to the habits of command essential to keep a thousand of these rough and daring spirits in order, and that, too, an order of the most implicit, steady, and active kind; nor to their knowledge of tactics, and conduct in battle. The true definition of the line-of-battle ship being, a floating regiment of artillery in a barrack, which, at the beat of a drum, may be turned into a field of battle, or, at the command of government, may be sent flying on the wings of the wind round the world. We think that we have thus established our proposition. If not, let any thing else be shown which exhibits the same quantity of power packed within the same space; and that power, too, increasing daily by new contrivances of stowage, and building, by new models of guns, and new inventions in machinery. England is at this moment building two hundred steam-ships, with guns of a calibre to which all the past were trifling, with room for a regiment of land troops besides their crews, and with the known power of defying wind and wave, and throwing an army in full equipment for the field, within a few days, on any coast of Europe.

Dublin University Magazine.

[From a Tale of the Civil Wars of England, by James, in the above-named Magazine, entitled "Arrah Neil, or the Times of Old," we take the two following extracts.]

THOUGHTS ON DEATH.

SILENCE, and midnight solitude, and the proximity of graves, and shrouds, and mouldering clay, are things well calculated to excite the imagination even of the cold and calculating, to damp the warm energies of hope, and open all the sources of terror and supersti-