

Literature, &c.

The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.
A PASSAGE OF MEXICAN LIFE.

I HAD made up my mind, before returning to the sea-coast, to visit the presidio of Tabac, and bade my guide Anastasio to hold himself in readiness for the journey. Pressing matters of business, however, required his presence in a distant quarter; it was therefore agreed that he should conduct me to a place from which I might find my way alone, by adhering implicitly to the instructions he would give me as to the route. Having completed our preparations, we started the next morning before daybreak. Besides a small quantity of pinola in a valise, we each carried a goat-skin filled with water, as the route lay across a region entirely devoid of the precious element. Believing this to be our whole stock of provisions, I was surprised when daylight came to see a sheep's head, newly cut from the carcass, hanging to Anastasio's saddle, and inquired what he intended to do with it.

'It is our hope for to-morrow's breakfast,' he answered: 'it will be the last meal we shall eat together, and I should like you to say whether you have ever eaten anything more juicy than a sheep's head (*tatemada*)—smothered—seasoned with pimento, and based with brandy. I carry all that we shall want in one of my *mochilas*,' he added, pointing to the leathern pouches worn by travellers.

In proportion, as we advanced, the country presented a new aspect. At first a few scarcely-beaten paths had guided us into the solitudes, but these tracks ended in immense prairies, without trees or bushes, but which covered with tall grass, that bent with the least breath of air, presented the appearance of an agitated gulf surrounded by blue hills. So extensive were these plains, that the horizon seemed always to flee before us, notwithstanding the speed of our horses; and we were still in the interminable savannas as the sun went down. We kept on, however, steering our course by the pole-star, until we reached the borders of the sandy regions, where we halted under the shelter of a little wood.

As soon as our frugal repast was over, Anastasio thought of the next morning's breakfast; the preparations for which are worthy of record. With his knife he dug a hole in the loose soil, about a foot in depth and diameter, and filled the cavity with dried leaves, which he set on fire, and threw in a handful of light branches. On this a pile of thicker sticks was placed and covered with a layer of pebbles. As the wood burnt away, the stones became hot, and with the decrease of the fire, sank to the bottom of the hole. The sheep's head, with its woolly covering was then thrown into this oven and the orifice closed with green branches, over which the operator trampled several layers of earth. When this was done, Anastasio announced that we had nothing to do but to sleep until morning.

The next day, as soon as the sun appeared, Anastasio saddled our horses for the last time; he then drew the skins of water from the bushes, where they had been placed to be kept cool; and put his brandy flask within reach. The hole in which the sheep's head was baking was next to be opened; the knife had scarcely touched the covering of earth when a savoury odour arose from the cavity. The appearance of the *tatemada*, when first drawn out, was but slightly appetising: it looked like a burnt shapeless lump, but Anastasio, removing carefully the black crust, brought into view the juicy meat beneath; and it must be confessed that our parting meal was one most delicious. At last the moment of separation came; always respectful, my guide advanced to hold my stirrup: I pressed his hand as that of a friend; my course lay to the north, his to the south, and we soon lost sight of each other.

Anastasio's multiplied instructions relieved me of all inquietude as to the path I was to take, and I pushed resolutely forwards. So temperate are Mexican horses, that I could count upon my animal being able to traverse the distance that separated us from a small river without drinking. My goatskin was half full: it was scarcely eight in the morning, and I had ten hours of sun before me; but the sun which lighted me on my way, at the same time burnt up the desert. As it rose higher above the horizon, a scorching reflection rose from the sandy soil; the south wind dried my lips; it seemed that I was breathing fire instead of air. I went on thus for two hours, when a strange weakness seized me, a shudder ran through my whole body, and I shivered with cold on the scorching plain. After struggling with the malady for some time I dismounted, hoping to warm myself upon the hot sand. A devouring heat, succeeded during which I finished my last drop of water without thinking of the future. Meantime the sun rose higher, and increased the suffocating heat. I tried to remount my horse but fell down again in extreme lassitude, while my thirst became more ardent than ever. New attempts only served to convince me more of inability. I was yielding to the heavy effects of a drowsy languor, when a distant noise struck my ear, similar to that of a dragon's rattling against his spurs. Shortly after a horseman well armed and mounted, stopped before me: I opened my eyes.

'Holla! friend,' he cried in a rough voice, 'what are you doing there?' My long beard and worn and dusty garments, were perhaps an excuse for this imperious and familiar in-

ry. I was however annoyed, and replied at first bluntly, 'Do you not see I am occupied—dying of thirst!'

The stranger smiled. A distended skin hung at his saddle bow; the sight of it, while redoubling my thirst, dispelled my pride. He spoke again, and asked the unknown rider to lead me the precious object.

'Heaven forbid that I should refuse you,' he answered in a milder tone. I stretched out my hand greedily; but the horseman seeing me disposed to empty the skin, filled a calabash, which he held out to me. I swallowed the contents at a draught. When I had somewhat recovered, my benefactor inquired where I was going.

'To the Presidio of Tabac,' was my answer.

'To the Presidio of Tabac!' he repeated in astonishment. 'By St. Josef your back is towards it.'

In the bewilderment caused by my fever I had forgotten Anastasio's instructions, and mistaken the route. The path I was following, as I could see by the sun, led to the west.

'Listen,' said the stranger, as he again gave me to drink; but as parsimoniously as the first time; 'by sundown you may reach the *hacienda de la Noria*. Take my advice and go there; you will be well received.'

I alleged my extreme weakness. He reflected for a moment, and then continued—'I cannot wait to conduct you: imperious reasons compel me to be far from here at the close of the day, and motives not less powerful ought to prevent me from going to the hacienda; but as my road passes close by, I will call and have some water and a spare horse sent to you; for exhausted as you and your beast appear to be, you cannot arrive to-day unassisted; and in these waterless solitudes such a sun as this, he who dares not arrive to-day, will not arrive to-morrow. Try however, to regain a little strength, and advance slowly. If you follow step by step, the trace of my lasso, which I will let drag on the sand, you will not be likely to go astray again.'

I thanked him warmly for his good intentions. 'A last caution,' he said, 'do not forget to say that chance alone takes you to the hacienda.' With those words he loosened the coil of his leathern rope, and rode off at a brisk trot, leaving a slight furrow upon the sand. The hope of soon arriving at an inhabited place, and the water I had drunk gave me a slight renewal of strength. For the first time my position appeared to me such as it really was, and I remounted my horse, but the poor animal had not, as I, been able to appease his thirst: with drooping head and ears he crawled, rather than walked, notwithstanding the persuasion of the spur. From time to time I stopped, trying to discover the scarcely visible traces of the lasso upon the sand, and hoping to hear the voices of those sent in quest of me; but all was silent; and I then continued my way, mechanically repeating the words, 'He who does not arrive to-day, will not arrive to-morrow.' The sun was already getting low. The sand sent up a scorching heat, and the hum of insects announced the coming darkness. Physical pain again began to heighten mental anguish: I felt my tongue swell and my throat on fire. All at once my horse neighed; and as if some mysterious communication came to him upon the wind set off at a more rapid pace; and I, just as the sun was sinking behind a stripe of wood at the horizon, fancied that I heard the distant lowing of cattle. In another half hour I reached the trees, behind which the sun had disappeared. An immense plain stretched before me, presenting a most radiant spectacle, only to be appreciated by those who have been tortured with a thirst in deserts of an unknown extent.

An immense carpet of bright green turf, intersected with numerous paths, covered the surface of the plain. Numerous gum trees thickly grouped, formed a pleasant shelter. The cool damp air which caressed my face, still inflamed with the heat of the scorching waste, announced the presence of water, fertilizing the delightful oasis. In fact, a large cistern, supplied from an abundant spring, stood under the shade of a few trees at a little distance. An enormous wheel turned by four pairs of mules, poured a continual supply of water from the leathern buckets on its rim into the hollowed trunks of gigantic trees, where it sparkled gloriously in the beams of sunset. In these enormous troughs the numerous cattle came to drink, while at a distance a troop of horses were leaping and galloping in formidable tumult. Jackals, and other nocturnal depredators, driven by thirst, seemed so forget that the sun was yet shining, and the presence of man, and showed their lank muzzles at a distance, eager to drink of the spring, which poured out its streams for all. Such must have been the encampments of the Biblical ages, formed by the tents and dependants of the patriarchs.

In an instant, horse and rider, we began to drink as though we wished to drain the fountain. While stopping to take breath, I heard voices behind a little clump of trees, which I soon made out to be those of two men playing at cards. I learned as they continued to converse, that one of them had been sent to my assistance; but meeting with a comrade here on the skirts of the hacienda, the unconquerable love of gaming, born with every Mexican made him sit down to play, leaving me to take my chance. I rode round to show that his services in my case would not now be required: the only remark he made was one of

pleasure at being able to prolong his game. I left them at their cards, and leading my leading my horse, walked down to the hacienda. It was yet at some distance, and twilight was darkening the landscape as I passed long rows of posts on either side of the path forming the cattle enclosures. One was deserted, but in the other thick clouds of dust were driven about. Approaching nearer to the fence, I saw a bull struggling furiously, with a man upon his back, armed with a knife, while another individual was holding a cord passed several times round the animal's legs. The rider seemed to be pating down the bull's horns, and sharpening their extremities. The beast, finding resistance vain, at last lay still, when the man dipped a thick bung into a calabash, and rubbed it several times up and down the horns, as though to coat them with some liquid preparation. As soon as the operation was over, the bull was released from his fastenings; and before his rage had time to vent itself, his two tormentors had reached the entrance to the inclosure, and barricaded it with strong beams on the side opposite to that where I was standing. In the rider of the animal I recognized the horseman who had relieved me in the desert some hours previously. What motive could have induced him to stay at the hacienda, fearful as he appeared to be of calling there? It was a mystery I could not explain, and my thoughts were still occupied with it as I walked into the courtyard of the building.

During my residence in this place I witnessed many remarkable incidents, highly characteristic of the people and the country. The one, however, that made the most impression upon me, is intimately connected with the circumstances above described.

The day after my arrival was an anniversary, in which all the horsemen of the establishment vied with each other in showing their skill and dexterity in managing the half-wild animals beneath them. To a stranger, the sight was interesting and exciting, so great appeared the hazard, and such the daring exhibited. After several hours passed in this way one of the men came up with a bundle of short lances under his arm, and immediately a cry was raised for Cayetano, who, to my great surprise was invested with the office of major-domo, or major-domo, of the establishment, and had undertaken to break a weapon with the bull.

A single bull only remained in the spacious enclosure; it was the one I had seen thrown down the previous evening. Cayetano, whose features showed the traces of envy's passion, took one of the *garrochas*, or short lances, and entered unaccompanied into the arena. The bull was released from the tether by which he had been fastened to a post, and needed no exciting to rush to the attack. Cayetano made a few passes as an accomplished cavalier, to avoid the first assault, and waited a favorable moment for a thrust. The opportunity soon presented itself, the bull stooped to collect his strength for a new rush, and immediately the point of the *garrocha* was buried in his shoulder-joint, and his opponent's vigorous arm held him at bay, but as he looked round in triumph, the lance broke and in the first moment of surprise, he was unable to escape the charge of the infuriated animal. With a sudden start Cayetano brought his hand to his thigh, where a few drops of blood stained his white linen drawers. An imprecation burst from his lips, more in rage at the humiliation than from pain, he asked for a new lance, and moved towards the opposite end of the lists.

A few minutes passed before the weapon was brought, when he again advanced to meet the bull. Cayetano's manner, betrayed a singular hesitation: I knew it could not arise from fear, as I had once before seen him cool and collected in more critical circumstances. An air of dejection that speedily followed the former uncertainty was still more inexplicable, for no blood had followed the first few drops upon his leg. At last, just as he was lifting his lance mechanically for another thrust at the bull, his horse reared, shrunk back, and to the general surprise, the rider offered no resistance, but suffered himself to be carried from the enclosure. Mangled yells, hisses, and hootings were lavished upon him in his flight. Cayetano, however, appeared to be insensible to the contumely, he reeled in the saddle like a drunken man, while his face assumed a death-like pallor.

'The chaplain! the chaplain!' cried several voices in an ironical tone: 'there goes a Christian in danger of death, and another volley of hisses followed the major-domo, who appeared to be universally detested. But the chaplain who had shown much interest in the spectacle, seemed unwilling to quit his seat; or to consider the call on his functions as serious, until at a sign from his chief he mounted his horse reluctantly, and rode after the fugitive.

The bull had profited by the tumult to make his escape to the forest without any one offering resistance. This result was not at all to the taste of the numerous dependants of the hacienda, and they finished the day with new feats of horsemanship. Late in the evening, on returning to the house, I met the individual to whose passion for card-playing my life had nearly fallen a sacrifice the day before, and they finished the day with new feats of horsemanship. Late in the evening, on returning to the house, I met the individual to whose passion for card-playing my life had nearly fallen a sacrifice the day before, and inquired what had become of Cayetano, when, to my astonishment, Juan, for that was the man's name, told me that the unlucky major-

domo was dead: 'Dead!' I exclaimed; 'he was scarcely wounded.'

'True,' replied the other; but it appears that the bull's horns had been washed over with the juice of the *palo mulato*, and the death of his antagonist was as horrible as it was rapid. You have not forgotten the stranger who relieved you in the desert, and called here to send you assistance, well, this man, Feliciano, is brother of one of Cayetano's former friends. This friend was acquainted with a secret, of which our major-domo would have liked to deprive him, and his life at the same time, and had communicated it to his brother, together with his suspicions of Cayetano's character. These suspicions were but too well founded. One day Feliciano's brother went out in a boat with his treacherous enemy, and was never seen afterwards. Feliciano then suspected that his brother had been made away with, and commenced a search for the murderer. Having heard that Cayetano was living here, he started for the hacienda, and arrived just in time to see his enemy die—and without confessing.'

While we were speaking, the chaplain with another horseman came up: from their conversation, I learned that the poisoning of the bull's horns was regarded as an inexplicable mystery. The singular operation, however, of which I had been a spectator the previous evening, without being myself seen left me no reason to doubt that Feliciano had adopted it as a ready and effectual means of satisfying his vengeance.

CHILDHOOD

The innocence of childhood is the tenderest, the sweetest, and not the least potent remonstrance against the vices and errors of grown man, if he would but listen to the lesson and take it to his heart. Seldom, too seldom, do we do so.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

DANISH JUSTICE.

THE war had broken out between England and France, Bonaparte had broken the treaty of Amiens: all was consternation amongst our countrymen in India, particularly those who had valuable cargoes at sea, and those who were about to return to their native land. I was one of the latter class; so I joyfully accepted a passage home on board a Danish-Danmark, as yet, remaining neuter in our quarrel.

So far as luxury went, I certainly found her very inferior to our regular Indianmen; but as a sailer, she was far superior, and in point of discipline, her crew was as well regulated, and as strictly commanded as the crew of a British man-of-war. In fact, such order, regularity, and implicit obedience I could never have believed to exist on board a merchantman.

The chief mate was one of the finest young men I ever saw. He had just been promoted to his present post—not from the mere fact of his being the owner's son, but really from sterling merit. He was beloved by the crew, amongst whom he had served, as is usual in the Danish service, five years, and was equally popular with his brother officers and the passengers returning to Europe.

The only bad character we had on board was the cook, a swarthy ill-looking Portuguese, who managed somehow or other daily to cause some disturbance amongst the sea-men. For this he had often been reprimanded and the evening when this sketch opens, he had just been released from irons, into which he had been ordered for four-and-twenty hours by the chief mate for having attempted to poison a sailor who had offended him. In return for having punished him thus severely, the irritated Portuguese swore to revenge himself on the first officer.

The mate who was called Charles, was walking in the waist with a beautiful young English girl, to whom he was engaged to be married, stopping occasionally to admire the flying fish, as they skimmed over the surface of the water, pursued by their cruel destroyer, talking over the anticipated bliss their union would confer; their hopes and fears, the approval of their parents, their bright prospects, indulging in future scenes of life as steady as the trade wind before which they were quietly running—when suddenly, ere a soul could interpose, or even suspect his design, the cook rushed forward and buried his knife with one plunge into the heart of the unfortunate young man, who fell without a cry, as the exulting Portuguese burst forth into a demoniac laugh of triumph.

Unconscious of the full extent of her bereavement, the poor girl hung over him, and as a friend, who had rushed forward to support him, drew the knife from his bosom, her whole dress, which was white, was stained with blood. With an effort Charles turned towards her, gave her one last look of fervent affection, and as the blade left the wound fell a corpse in the arms of him who held him.

By this time then captain had come on deck. He shed tears like a child, for he loved poor Charles as his own son. The exasperated crew would instantly have fallen on the assassin, and taken summary vengeance, so truly attached had they been to the chief mate, and were only kept within bounds by their commander's presence. The cook, who appeared to glory in his deed, was instantly seized and confined. The corpse was taken below, while the wretched betrothed was carried in a state of insensibility to her cabin.

Eight bells had struck the following evening