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in the Year 1826: With some Account of the Mines of that Country: Volume 2

G. F. Lyon

Excerpt

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RESIDENCE AND TOUR

IN

MEXICO.

CHAPTER VII.

Route from Bolaños to Guadalajara—Cuesta Pericos—Plain of Potierillos—Hacienda of Estanzuela—Gang of Robbers—Real del Mesquital—San Cristobal—Rio Grande—Pass of Escalon—Crosses—Guadalajara—Theatre—Hospital—Campo Santo—San Gonzalo de Amarante—Superstition of the Guajolote or Turkey Dance—Public Buildings—Unsettled state of this part of the country.

I LEFT Bolaños on the afternoon of the 31st of August, accompanied by Messrs. Auld and Price; and riding south along the base of the mountains through a rugged but beautiful country, we passed, after rising a wooded hill to avoid the river, the pretty little village of Cheinaltatan, which,

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with its plantations of sugar-cane, is situated at the foot of a picturesque cliff by the eastern bank of the river. Hence, to the music of a heavy thunder-storm, we rode through close thickets and bad paths, until at a shady little brook we found some fishermen cooling their fish, which they were conveying to Bolaños, for sale. We purchased some very nice trout and catfish, and again went on until five leagues from Bolaños, and arrived at sunset at three small Rancho huts of Guatima, standing in an open space amongst the thickets above a rapid mountain-stream, whence trout and other fish are procured.

September 1.—My friends having left me at 7 A. M., we rode forward over very uneven paths, through roads bounded by impenetrable thickets, until we arrived at the fatiguing and steep ascent of the “Cuesta Pericos,” to a level of which we ascended after four hours of distressing labour to the cattle. There being abundance of fine grass amongst the tall firs and oak-trees, we turned our jaded animals loose to feed for a couple of hours.

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PLAIN OF POTIERILLOS.

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The whole of this Cuesta is thickly wooded by the broad-leaved oak for the lower half, and towards the summit by fine pines and the Encino, on whose branches I remarked abundance of parasitic plants, particularly two kinds which closely resembled our English misletoe. In the course of my day's ride I observed above thirty trees of tall firs and oaks lying split and shivered to the ground by lightning. Woodpeckers of many beautiful varieties here abounded, particularly the species with a scarlet crest, and a very large kind nearly the size of a Bantam fowl.

Again ascending for three hours, we reached a small space of table-land on the top of the mountain well covered with maize fields, and stopped at one of the very small wretched huts with which the plain called Potierillos was dotted at distant intervals. A heavy thunder-storm prevented our sleeping with the baggage under the broad-leaved oaks; we were therefore obliged to beg shelter against the coming torrents within the hut, which had no side walls and merely a roof, beneath the

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centre of which there was barely room to stand upright. Some management too was necessary to clear away a space for me to lie down on my *Armas de Agua* *, without the risk of being burnt by the fire which occupied the centre. While this matter was arranging I heard a loud outcry, and two little half-naked boys in an instant killed a considerable sized rattle-snake, which had been turned out of its bed to make room for me. The rain came down in torrents all night; but although stowed as close as figs, we were grateful for the shelter of the hut. Besides the fire and cooking apparatus, occupying the best half, were a man, his wife, five variously sized children, and five of my own party. Our hosts were very good-natured, excessively dirty, and miserably poor In-

* Or more properly, *Armas de Pelo*. These are two tanned goat-skins with the hair on, which are fastened to the pommel of the saddle, one on each side, and tied by a string round the waist to protect the legs from the rain. When not used, they are rolled up and confined with a leather thong; but are always attached to their place, and pendent from the saddle, ready for immediate use.

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HACIENDA OF ESTANZUELA.

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dians: but as I was the first European they had ever spoken with, they questioned me abundantly, and in some instances with great natural good sense.

September 2.—After a night of heavy rain, we set out in a fine clear morning down a wild rugged descent, and then occasionally over rich verdant plains; but more generally amongst bold picturesque mountains thickly clothed with wood. Here in a close defile we met three poor fellows, who informed us of their having been stopped and robbed two days before, by thirteen men completely armed. These rogues had plundered them of three mules with valuable cargoes; three horses with their furniture; five ounces of gold, and about one hundred dollars; completing the business by stripping them naked and leaving them bound hand and foot on the road all night, where next morning they were found and liberated by some travellers. At sunset we reached the Hacienda of Estanzuela, situated in a valley highly cultivated with maize; and had scarcely dismounted, when a party of seventeen armed merchants ar-

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rived with valuable cargoes from Guadalajara. On the preceding day these people had met the robbers, fifteen in number, well mounted and completely armed, with a few on foot, and some who appeared to walk in ambush at a little distance. The parties, equally afraid of each other, met in so narrow a path that they actually touched; and when all had passed, the captain of the band fired a pistol at one of the merchants, who had recognized and called him by name. All the robbers then starting at full gallop were feebly pursued, yet the travellers cut off six loose horses. I was now informed that almost every man, and the captain in particular, of this formidable gang was known to the people of Guadalajara. They always fearlessly spent their money which was gained on the road, in the city; and then as openly assembled their forces and sallied out to plunder again. The merchants of the place had frequently but vainly called on the Government to put down these daring people; yet this blessed country, with “God and Liberty” for its motto,

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ROBBERS.

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continued to countenance, by the fear or indifference of its authorities, the most glaring and constant enormities.

September 3.—As only three of my little party were armed, I hired five men, who had three very peaceable-looking muskets, two swords, and a spear, to accompany me; and early on the morning of the 3rd set out with my troop for San Cristobal. In two hours we passed the spot on the top of the Cuesta del Malacate where the three men had been pillaged, and where the grass was eaten quite short by the horses of the robbers. Soon after descending this very steep mountain-pass we met a boy, from whom we learnt that three armed men on horseback and two on foot had passed a short time before us; and I afterwards heard that they carried forward an account of my force, with the opinion that my cargo was of great value; probably from their having mistaken three heavy boxes of mineralogical specimens for cases of dollars. These men were afterwards seen to ford the river, and were traced to the mountain at which the robbers

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were assembled. At noon we reached a pass called La Sigueta, merely remarkable for having a few huts, and some magueys on the ridge. Up a deep valley to the N.E. of this place is the Real del Mesquital, at which a small gold mine is worked by a few poor people, who having no means of procuring effective implements, merely contrive to collect enough for their support.

At three, after winding along the ledges of the precipitous mountains which hem in the Rio San Cristobal, we descended through a delightful natural shrubbery to a village of the same name on its northern bank. I put up under the portal of the Alcalde's shop, where at half past three the thermometer stood at 89°,—a heat fully equal to that of Bolaños, which this place resembles in some slight respects, although far inferior to it in beauty. I was surrounded all the afternoon by a crowd of staring people, to which I was by this time fully accustomed; and as I sadly wished to wash myself and put on a clean shirt, I was at length obliged to perform these operations in public, even

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in the presence of two ladies of the Alcalde's family.—Fresh news of the robbers arrived in the evening, stating that they had plundered a large requa of mules. The Alcalde, who wished to go to Guadalaxara, now proposed to accompany me, as soon as he could on the morrow raise a force equal to mine, in order that if possible we might catch some of the rogues, to whom he had a mortal dislike. This was mingled with no small portion of dread, in consequence of their having lately robbed, stripped and bound him, together with a party with whom he travelled. Notice was also brought that a saddled horse, which had been standing all the past night and morning in the wood on the opposite side of the river, had been ridden off; and report said, that the robbers were in Escalon (a mountain-pass not far distant) awaiting a very rich cargo (no other than my poor shirts, stockings, and specimens!). My day was spent, as the preceding evening, in being stared at and questioned; and I was treated with a specimen of magisterial equity by the Alcalde, who had been

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loudly boasting to me, even in the face of all these robbing adventures, of the excellence and justice of the laws of Xalisco.—A man came up to us bathed in blood, which streamed from a cut in his head four inches in length inflicted with a hatchet: yet the brute who committed this outrage was only sentenced to four days' imprisonment! To this succeeded another act of equally rigid justice. We had observed a strong light on the beach, and soon learnt from a poor ferryman that a man had burnt his little watch-house. The culprit, a drunken quarrelsome fellow, but in tolerable circumstances, was merely desired to rebuild the hut and make some arrangement with the boatman;—and with this ended our Sunday evening amusements.

September 4.—The village of San Cristobal contains in itself about 300 souls, and the people within the “Cure” in the surrounding Ranchos amount to between 2000 and 3000 *mal contados*; a convenient term, signifying “something more or less.” It is situated between three rivers, none of which, however, were of any considerable depth or magni-