

***GUSTAVE
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ER SPIEGEL



***THE REBEL
CHIEF:
A TALE
OF GUERRILLA
LIFE***

Gustave Aimard

The Rebel Chief: A Tale of Guerilla Life

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THE REBEL CHIEF.

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CHAPTER I.

LAS CUMBRES.

No country in the world offers to the delighted traveller more charming landscapes than Mexico; among them all, that of Las Cumbres or the peak, is, without fear of contradiction, one of the most striking and most agreeably diversified.

Las Cumbres form a succession of defiles in the mountains, through which winds, with infinite meanderings, the road that runs to Puebla de los Ángeles (the town of the Angels), so called, because the angels, according to tradition, built the cathedral there. The road to which we allude, made by the Spaniards, runs along the side of the mountains with curves of extraordinary boldness, and is bordered on either side by an unbroken line of abrupt peaks, bathed in a bluish vapour at each turn of this road, which is, as it were, suspended over precipices clad with a luxurious vegetation. The scene changes, and grows more and more picturesque. The mountain peaks no longer rise behind one another, but gradually sink into the plain, while on the other hand, those left behind rise perpendicularly.

On July 2nd, 18—, about four in the afternoon, at the moment when the sun, already low on the horizon, only shed its beams obliquely on the earth, calcined by the heat

of the mediodía, and when the rising breeze was beginning to refresh the parching atmosphere, two horsemen, well mounted, emerged from a thick clump of yuccas, bananas, and purpled flowered bamboos, and turned into a dusty road, which led by a series of successive inclines to a valley in which a limpid stream ran through the verdure, and kept up its pleasant freshness.

The travellers, probably struck by the unexpected sight of the grand landscape which was so suddenly unfolded before them, stopped their horses, and after gazing for some minutes admiringly at the picturesque arrangement of the mountains, they dismounted, took off their horses' bridles, and sat down on the bank of the stream, with the evident intention of enjoying for a few minutes longer the effects of this admirable kaleidoscope, which is unique in the world.

Judging from the direction they were following, the travellers appeared to come from Orizaba, and to be going to Puebla de los Ángeles, whence they were at no great distance at the moment.

The two horsemen wore the attire of rich hacenderos, a costume which we have described too frequently to render a repetition necessary here: we will only mention one characteristic peculiarity rendered necessary by the slight degree of security on the roads at the time when our story takes place. Both were armed in a formidable manner, and carried with them a complete arsenal. In addition to the six-shot revolvers in their holsters, others were thrust through their belts. They carried in their hand a first-rate double barrel, turned out by Devismes, the celebrated Parisian

gunsmith; and thus each was enabled to fire twenty-six rounds, without counting the machete, or straight sabre, hanging at their side, the triangular-bladed knife thrust into the right boot, and the lasso, or reata, coiled on the saddle, to which it was securely attached by a carefully riveted iron ring.

Certainly if men thus armed were endowed with a fair amount of courage, they might face without disadvantage even a considerable number of enemies. However, they did not seem to trouble themselves at all about the wild and solitary aspect of the spot where they were, and conversed gaily while half reclining on the green grass, and carelessly smoking their cigars—real Havana *puros*.

The elder of the riders was a man of from forty to forty-five years, though he did not seem more than thirty-six, above the middle height; he was elegantly, though powerfully built, his well knit limbs denoted great bodily strength, he had marked features, and an energetic and intelligent countenance; his black sparkling eyes, ever in motion, were soft, but at times emitted brilliant flashes, when they were animated, and they then gave his face a harsh and savage expression impossible to describe; he had a lofty and spacious forehead, and sensual lips; a beard black and tufted like that of an Ethiopian, and mixed with silvery threads—fell on his chest; a luxuriant head of hair, thrown back, covered his shoulders, and his bronzed complexion was of a brick colour. In short, judging from his appearance, he was one of those determined men who are invaluable in certain critical circumstances, because a friend runs no risk of being deserted by them. Although it was

impossible to distinguish his nationality, his brusque, sharp gestures, and his quick imperative speech, seemed to give him a Southern origin.

His companion—who was much younger, for he did not appear above twenty-eight years of age—was tall, rather thin, and delicate looking, though not at all sickly; his elegant slim stature, and extremely small feet and hands, denoted high birth; his features were fine, his countenance pleasing and intelligent, and stamped with a great expression of gentleness; his blue eyes, light hair, and, above all, the whiteness of his complexion, caused him at once to be recognized as a European belonging to the temperate clime, recently landed in America.

We have said that the two travellers were conversing together, and the language they employed was French; the turn of their phrases, and the want of accent, led to the supposition that they were expressing themselves in their own language.

"Well, Count," said the elder, "do you regret having followed my advice, and instead of being jolted over execrable roads, undertaking this journey on horseback in the company of your humble servant?"

"By Jove! I should be very difficult to please were it so," the one to whom the title of count was given replied. "I have travelled through Switzerland, Italy, and the banks of the Rhine, like everybody else, and must confess that I never before saw such exquisite scenery as that which I have gazed on for the last few days—thanks to you."

"You are a thousand times too polite: the scenery is really very fine, and remarkably diversified," he added, with a

sardonic expression which escaped his companion; "and yet," he remarked with a stifled sigh, "I have seen finer, still."

"Finer than this?" the count exclaimed, stretching out his arm, and describing a semicircle in the air; "Oh, sir, that is not possible."

"You are young, my lord," the first speaker resumed with a sad smile; "your tourist travels have only been child's play. This attracts you by the contrast it forms to the other scenery, that is all; having never studied nature except from an opera stall, you did not suppose that it could hold such surprises in reserve for you; your enthusiasm has been suddenly raised to a diapason, which intoxicates you through the strangeness of the contrasts which are incessantly offered you; but if, like myself, you had wandered over the savannahs of the interior, the immense prairies over which the wild children of this country, whom civilisation has despoiled, roam in freedom—like myself, you would only have a smile of contempt for the scenery that surrounds us, and which at this moment you are admiring so conscientiously."

"What you say may be true," Mr. Oliver; "unfortunately I am not acquainted with the savannahs and prairies to which you refer, and probably shall never see them."

"Why not?" the first speaker interposed quickly; "You are young, rich, strong, and free—at least I suppose so. What is there to prevent you attempting an excursion into the great American desert? You are in a capital position at this moment to carry out such an expedition; it is one of those journeys, reputed impossible, of which you will be able to

speaking with pride hereafter when you return to your own country."

"I should like it," the count answered with a tinge of melancholy; "unluckily that is impossible, for my journey must terminate at Mexico."

"At Mexico?" Oliver repeated in surprise.

"Alas! Yes, sir, so it is; I am not my own master, and am now obeying the influence of stranger's will. I have simply come to this country to be married."

"Married! At Mexico! you, my lord?" Oliver exclaimed in astonishment.

"Yes," very prosaically, "married to a woman I do not know, who does not know me either, and who doubtless feels no more love for me than I do for her: we are related—we were betrothed in the cradle, and now the moment has arrived to keep the promise made in our names by our parents—that is all."

"But in that case the young lady is French?"

"Not at all: she is Spanish, and I believe a bit of a Mexican."

"But you are a Frenchman?"

"Certainly, and from Touraine to boot," he replied with a smile.

"That being so, allow me to ask, sir, how it happens that —"

"Oh, very naturally so; my story will not be long, and as you seem inclined to hear it, I will tell it you in a very few words. You know my name—I am Count Ludovic Mahiet de la Saulay; my family, which belongs to the Touraine, is one of the oldest in that province, and goes back to the first

Francs; one of my ancestors, so it is said, was one of the leaders of King Clovis, who gave him, as a reward for his faithful and valiant services, vast prairies bordered by willows, from which my family afterwards derived its name. I do not tell you of this origin through any absurd feeling of pride. Though of noble birth, I have been educated, thank Heaven, in ideas of progress sufficiently wide for me to know the value of a title in the present age, and to recognize that true nobility dwells entirely in elevated sentiments. Still, I was obliged to tell you these details concerning my family in order that you might thoroughly understand how my ancestors—who always held high offices under the different dynasties that have succeeded each other in France—happened to have a younger branch of the family Spanish, while the elder remained French. At the epoch of the league, the Spaniards, summoned by the partisans of the Guises, with whom they had formed an alliance against King Henry IV., then only called King of Navarre, were quartered for a rather lengthened period in Paris. I ask your pardon, my dear Mr. Oliver, for thus entering into details which may appear to you very wearisome."

"Pardon me, my lord, on the contrary, they greatly interest me; so pray go on."

The young man bowed and resumed—

"Now, the Count de Saulay—alive at that time—was an impetuous partisan of the Guises, and a very intimate friend of the Duke of Mayence; the count had three children—two sons, who fought in the ranks of the army of the League, and a daughter who was maid of honour to the Duchess of

Montpensier, the sister of the Duke of Mayence. The siege of Paris lasted a long time, it was even abandoned, then resumed by Henry IV, who eventually bought for ready money a city which he despaired of seizing, and which the Duc de Brissac, Governor of the Bastille for the league, sold him. Many of the officers serving under the Duke de Mendoza, Commander of the Spanish troops, and that general himself, had their families with them. In short, the younger son of my ancestor fell in love with one of the Spanish general's nieces, asked her in marriage, and obtained her hand; while his sister consented, by the persuasion of the Duchess of Montpensier, to give hers to one of the general's aides-de-camp. The artificial and politic duchess, thought by these alliances to keep the French nobility aloof from him whom she called, the Béarnais and the Huguenot, and retard his triumph if she did not render it impossible. As usually happens in such cases, her calculations proved to be false. The king re-conquered his kingdom, and those gentlemen most compromised in the troubles of the league, found themselves compelled to follow the Spaniards on their retreat, and leave France with them. My ancestor easily obtained his pardon of the king, who even deigned at a later date to give him an important command, and take his elder son into his service; but the younger, in spite of the entreaties and injunction of his father, never consented to return to France, and settled permanently in Spain. Still, though separated, the two branches of the family continued to maintain relations, and to intermarry. My grandfather married during the emigration a daughter of the Spanish branch: it is now my turn to

contract a similar alliance. You see, my dear sir, that all this is very prosaic, and not at all interesting."

"Then you are willing, with your eyes shut as it were, to marry a person you have never seen, and whom you do not even know?"

"What would you have? So matters are; my consent is useless in the affair; the engagement was solemnly made by my father, and I must honour his word. Besides," he added with a smile, "my presence here proves to you that I did not hesitate to obey. Perhaps, had my will been free, I should not have contracted this union; unfortunately it did not depend on me, and I was obliged to conform to my father's wishes. However, I must confess to you that having been brought up with the continual prospect of this marriage, and knowing it to be inevitable, I have gradually accustomed myself to the thought of contracting it, and the sacrifice is not so great to me as you might suppose."

"No matter," Oliver said with some degree of rudeness; "to the deuce with nobility and fortune if they impose such obligations—better a life of adventure in the desert and poor independence; at any rate you are your own master."

"I am perfectly of your opinion; but for all that, I must bow my head. Now, will you permit me to ask you a question?"

"Of course, most readily—two if you like."

"How is it that we—who met by accident at the French hotel in Veracruz, just after I had landed—have become so quickly and intimately attached?"

"As for that, it is impossible for me to answer. You pleased me at first sight, your manner attracted me. I

offered you my services; you accepted them, and we started together for Mexico. That is the whole story. When we arrive there we shall separate, doubtless, never to meet again, and all will be settled."

"Oh! Oh! Mr. Oliver, permit me to believe that you are mistaken; that, on the contrary, we shall meet frequently, and that our acquaintance will soon become a solid friendship."

The other shook his head several times.

"My lord," he said at length, "you are a gentleman, rich, and of good standing in the world; while I am but an adventurer, of whose past life you are ignorant, and whose name you scarce know, even supposing the one I bear at this moment is real; our positions are too different; there is between us a line of demarcation too distinctly traced for us ever to stand on a footing of suitable equality toward each other. So soon as we have re-entered civilisation, I feel—for I am older than you, and have a greater experience of the world—that I should soon become a burden to you; hence do not insist on this point, but let us both remain in our place. This, be convinced, will be better both for you and me. I am at this moment your guide rather than your friend, and this position is the only one that suits me: leave it to me."

The count was preparing to reply; but Oliver sharply seized his arm.

"Silence," he said; "listen—"

"I hear nothing," the young man remarked at the end of a moment.

"That is true," the other replied with a smile; "your ears are not like mine, open to every sound that troubles the silence of the desert; a carriage is rapidly coming up from the direction of Orizaba, and is following the same route as ourselves; you will soon see it appear, for I can perfectly distinguish the tinkling of the mule bells."

"It is doubtless the Veracruz diligence, in which my servants and luggage are, and which we are only a few hours ahead of."

"Perhaps it is; perhaps it is not. I should be surprised if it had caught us up so quickly."

"What does it matter to us?" the count said.

"Nothing, that is true, if it is the diligence," the other replied after a moment's reflection; "at any rate it is as well to take our precautions."

"Precautions, why?" the young man asked in astonishment.

Oliver gave him a look of singular meaning.

"You know nothing as yet about American life," he said presently; "in Mexico, the first law of existence is always to put yourself on guard against the possible chances of an ambuscade. Follow me, and do what you see me do."

"Are we going to conceal ourselves?"

"Of course," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Without any further reply, he went up to his horse, which he re-bridled, and leapt into the saddle with a lightness and dexterity denoting great practice, and then started at a gallop for a clump of liquidambars, distant a hundred yards at the most.

The count, involuntarily overpowered by the ascendancy which this man had contrived to obtain over him through his strange mode of dealing since they had been travelling together, jumped into the saddle and went after him.

"Good!" said the adventurer, as soon as they found themselves completely sheltered behind the trees; "Now let us wait."

Some minutes elapsed.

"Look!" Oliver said laconically, stretching out his hand in the direction of the little wood from which they had themselves emerged two hours previously.

The count mechanically turned his head in the direction; at the same instant some ten irregular horsemen, armed with sabres and long lances, entered the valley at a gallop, and proceeded along the road towards the first defile of the Cumbres.

"Soldiers of the Veracruz President," the young man muttered; "what is the meaning of this?"

"Wait," the adventurer remarked.

The rolling of a carriage soon became distinct, and a berlin appeared, dragged at a tremendous pace by a team of six mules.

"Maldición!" the adventurer exclaimed with an angry gesture on perceiving the carriage.

The young man looked at his companion: the latter was pale as a corpse, and a convulsive tremor ran over all his limbs.

"What is the matter?" the count asked him with interest.

"Nothing," he answered drily; "look—"

Behind the carriage a second squadron of cavalry came up at a gallop, following it at a slight distance, and raising clouds of dust as they passed.

Ere long cavalry and berlin entered the defile, when they soon disappeared.

"Confound it," the young man said with a laugh; "those are prudent travellers, at any rate; they will not run a risk of being plundered by the salteadores."

"Do you think so?" Oliver asked with an accent of biting sarcasm. "Well, you are mistaken, for they will be attacked within an hour, and probably by the soldiers paid to defend them."

"Nonsense—that is impossible."

"Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, for the rarity of the fact."

"You will have to take care though, for possibly powder may be burned."

"I hope so too."

"Then you are resolved to defend these travellers?"

"Certainly, if they are attacked."

"I repeat that they will be attacked."

"In that case we will fight."

"That will do: are you a good rider?"

"Don't trouble yourself about me; when you pass I will."

"Well, then, in Heaven's name, we have only just the time to get there; and mind and keep an eye on your horse, for on my soul, we are about to have such a ride as you never saw."

The two riders leaned over their steeds' necks, and loosing the bridle, while at the same time digging in the

spurs, they started on the track of the travellers.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRAVELLERS.

At the period when our story takes place, Mexico was going through one of those terrible crises, whose periodical return has gradually brought this hapless country into the extremity to which it is now reduced, and whence it cannot possibly emerge unaided. The following are the facts that occurred:—

General Zuloaga, nominated President of the Republic, one day found—it is not known why—power too oppressive for his shoulders, and abdicated in favour of General don Miguel Miramón, who was consequently appointed interim President. The latter, an energetic and most ambitious man, began by governing at Mexico, where he was careful in the first instance to have his nomination to the first magistracy approved by Congress, who unanimously elected him, and by the ayuntamiento.

Miramón hence found himself *de facto* and *de jure* legitimate interim President; that is to say, for the period that must still elapse until the general elections.

Matters went on tolerably well for a considerable period; but Zuloaga, doubtless wearied of the obscurity in which he was living, altered his mind one fine day, and suddenly at a moment when it was least expected, issued a proclamation to the people, came to an understanding with the partisans of Juárez, who, in his quality of Vice President on Zuloaga's abdication, had not recognized the new President, but had

himself elected constitutional President at Veracruz by a so-called national junta, and published a decree, by which he revoked his abdication, and took back from Miramón the power he had entrusted to him.

Miramón was but little affected by this unusual declaration, as he confided in the right he imagined he had, and which Congress had sanctioned. He went alone to the house inhabited by General Zuloaga, seized his person, and compelled him to follow him; saying with a sarcastic smile—

"As you desire to resume the power, I am going to teach you how a man becomes President of the Republic."

And, keeping him as a hostage, though treating him with a certain degree of respect, he obliged him to accompany him on a campaign, which he undertook in the interior provinces against the generals of the opposite party, who, as we have said, assumed the name of Constitutionals.

Zuloaga offered no resistance: he apparently yielded to his fate, and accepted the consequences of his position so far as to complain to Miramón about not having a command in his army. The latter allowed himself to be deceived by this feigned resignation, and promised that his desire should be satisfied at the first battle. But one fine morning, Zuloaga and his aides-de-camp, who had been appointed to guard, rather than do him honour, suddenly disappeared, and it was learnt a few days after, that they had taken refuge with Juárez, from whose capital Zuloaga began protesting again more than ever against the violence done him, and fulminating decrees against Miramón.

Juárez is a cautious, cunning Indian, a profound dissimulator, a skilful politician. He is the only President of

the Republic, since the declaration of independence, who was not a military man. Issuing from the lowest classes of Mexican society, he gradually rose, by dint of tenacity, to the eminent post which he so recently occupied. Knowing better than anyone else the character of the nation which he pretended to govern, no one knew so well as he how to flatter popular passions, and excite the enthusiasm of the masses. Gifted with an immeasurable ambition, which he carefully concealed beneath the cloak of a deep love for his country, he had gradually succeeded in creating a party, which, at the period of which we write, had grown formidable. The constitutional President organized his government at Veracruz, and from his cabinet instructed his generals to fight Miramón. Although he was not recognized by any power but the United States, he acted as if he were the true and legitimate depository of the national power. The adhesion of Zuloaga, whom he despised in his heart for his cowardice and nullity, supplied him with the weapon he needed to carry out his plans successfully. He made him, so to speak, the standard of his party, by declaring that Zuloaga must first be restored to the power which had been violently torn from him by Miramón, and that they would then proceed to new elections. However, Zuloaga did not hesitate to recognize him solemnly as sole President, legitimately nominated by the free election of the citizens.

The question was distinctly laid down. Miramón represented the conservative party, that is to say, the party of the clergy, large landowners and merchants; while Juárez represented the absolute democratic party.

The war then assumed formidable dimensions. Unluckily, money is needed to wage war, and that was what Juárez was entirely without, for the following reasons:

In Mexico the public fortunes are not concentrated in the hands of the government. Each state, each province retains the free disposal and management of the private funds of the towns forming parts of its territory; so that, instead of the provinces being dependent on the government, the government and metropolis endure the yoke of the provinces, which, when they revolt, stop the subsidies, and place the power in a critical position. Moreover, two thirds of the public fortune are in the hands of the clergy, who take very good care not to part with it, and who, as they pay no taxes, or obligations of any sort, spend their time in lending out their money at a high rate of interest, and ostensibly engage in usury, which enriches them, while they run no risk of losing their capital.

Juárez, though master of Veracruz, found himself, then, in a very critical position; but he is a man of resources, and felt no embarrassment in finding the money he wanted. He first began by laying hands on the customs of Veracruz, then he organized cuadrillas, or guerillas, who had no scruples in attacking the haciendas of the partisans of Miramón, Spaniards settled in the country, and generally very rich, and of foreigners of all nations who possessed any worth taking. These guerillas did not restrict their exploits to this; they undertook to plunder travellers and attack convoys: and it must not be supposed that we are exaggerating the facts, on the contrary, we are toning them down. We must add, for the sake of being just, that Miramón, for his part, let

no opportunity slip for employing the same means, when he had the chance; but this was rare, for his position was not so advantageous as that of Juárez for fishing with profit in troubled waters.

It is true that the guerilleros acted apparently on their own account, and were loudly disapproved by both governments, who feigned on some occasions to act with severity against them; but the veil was so transparent, that the farce deceived nobody.

Mexico was thus transformed into an immense brigand's cave, in which one half of the population plundered and assassinated the other. Such was the political situation of this hapless country at the epoch to which we allude. It is dubious whether it has much changed since, unless to become worse.

On the same day that our narrative commences—at the moment when the sun, still beneath the horizon, was beginning to bar the dark blue sky with brilliant beams of purple and gold, a rancho, built of reeds, and resembling—though it was very large—a hen house, offered an animated appearance, very singular at so early an hour.

This rancho, built in the centre of a grassy patch, in a delicious situation, only a few paces from the Rincón grande, had been changed a short time before into a venta, or inn, for travellers surprised by the night, or who, for some reason, preferred stopping here to pushing on to the town.

On a rather large space of ground left unoccupied in front of the venta, the bales of several convoys of mules were ranged in a semicircle, and piled on one another with some degree of symmetry. In the middle of the circle the arrieros

crouching near the fire, were boucaning tasajo for their breakfast, or repairing the saddles of the animals, which, separated in troops, were eating their provender of maize placed on pesadas spread out on the ground. A berlin, loaded with trunks and boxes, was standing in a shed by the side of a diligence, which had been forced to stop here, owing to an accident to one of its wheels. Several travellers, who had spent the night in the open air, rolled up in their *sarapes*, were beginning to wake, while others were walking up and down, smoking their papilitos; some who were more active, had already saddled their horses, and were starting at a gallop in various directions.

Ere long, the mayoral of the diligence came out from under his vehicle, where he had slept on the grass, gave his animals their forage, washed the wounds produced by the harness, and then began summoning the travellers. The latter, aroused by his shouts, came out of the venta, half awake, and went to take their places in the coach. They were nine in number, with the exception of two individuals, dressed in the European style, and easily to be recognized as Frenchmen. All the rest wore the Mexican garb, and appeared to be true *hijos del país*, that is to say, children of the country.

At the moment when the driver, or mayoral—a pure-blooded Yankee—after succeeding, by dint of Yankee oaths mingled with bad Spanish, in getting his passengers into the vehicle, which was half dislocated by the jolting of the road, was taking up the reins to start, the galloping of horses, accompanied by the rattling of sabres, was heard, and a

band of horsemen, dressed in a sort of uniform, though in very bad condition, halted in front of the rancho.

This troop, composed of twenty men, with hangdog faces, was commanded by an alférez, or sub-lieutenant, as poorly attired as his soldiers; but his weapons were in excellent condition.

This officer was a tall, thin, but muscular man, with a crafty face, sly eye, and bistre-coloured complexion.

"Hola, compadre," he shouted to the mayoral, "you are starting at a very early hour, it strikes me."

The Yankee, so insolent a moment before, suddenly changed his manner: he bowed humbly, with a false smile, and answered in a soothing voice, while affecting a great joy, which he probably did not feel—

"Ah! Válgame Dios! It is señor don Jesús Domínguez! What a fortunate meeting! I was far from expecting so great a happiness this morning. Has your Excellency come to escort the diligence?"

"Not today; another duty brings me."

"Oh! Your Excellency is perfectly right; my travellers do not at all deserve so honourable an escort. They are costenos, who do not appear to me at all rich. Besides, I shall be obliged to stop at least three hours at Orizaba, to repair my coach."

"In that case, good-bye, and go to the deuce!" the officer answered.

The mayoral hesitated a moment, but then, instead of stating as he was ordered, he rapidly got down from his box and went up to the officer.

"You have some news to give me, have you not, compadre?" the latter said.

"I have señor," the mayoral replied with a false laugh.

"Ah, ah," said the other, "and what is it, good or bad?"

"El Rayo is ahead on the road to Mexico." The officer gave an almost imperceptible start at this revelation, but at once recovered himself.

"You are mistaken," he said.

"No, I am not, for I saw him as I see you now." The officer seemed to reflect for a minute or two.

"Very good, I thank you, compadre, I will take my precautions. And your travellers?"

"They are poor scamps, with the exception of the two servants of a French count, whose trunks fill, up the whole coach. The others do not deserve any notice. Do you intend to examine them?"

"I have not yet decided; I will think over it."

"Well, you will act as you think proper. Pardon me for leaving you, señor don Jesús, but my passengers are growing impatient and I must be off."

"Good-bye then for the present."

The mayoral mounted to his box, lashed his mules, and the vehicle started at a pace not very reassuring for those whom it contained, and who ran a risk of breaking their bones at every turn of the road.

So soon as the officer was alone he went up to the ventero who was engaged in measuring maize for some arrieros, and addressing him haughtily, asked:

"Eh! Have you not a Spanish caballero and a lady here?"

"Yes," the ventero replied, doffing his hat with a respect mingled with fear. "Yes, señor officer, a rather aged caballero, accompanied by a very young lady, arrived here yesterday a little after sunset, in the berlin which you can see there under the shed: they had an escort with them. From what the soldiers said, they have come from Veracruz, and are going to Mexico."

"Those are the people I am sent to serve as their escort as far as Puebla de los Ángeles; but they do not seem in any hurry to start: yet, it will be a long day's journey and they would do well to hurry."

At this moment an inner door was opened, a richly dressed gentleman entered the common room, and after slightly raising his hat and uttering the usual Ave María Purísima, he walked up to the officer who, on perceiving him, had taken several steps toward him.

This new personage was a man of about fifty-five years of age, but still in his prime: he was tall and elegant, his features were handsome and noble, and an expression of frankness and kindness was spread over his countenance.

"I am don Antonio de Carrera," he said, addressing the officer; "I heard the few words you addressed to our host: I believe, sir, that I am the person you have orders to escort."

"It is true, señor," the sub-lieutenant politely replied, "the name you have mentioned is really the one written on the order of which I am the bearer: I await your good pleasure, ready to do whatever you may desire."

"I thank you, señor: my daughter is slightly unwell, and I should be afraid of injuring her delicate health, if I set out at so early an hour. If you have no objection, we will remain a

few hours longer here, and then set out after breakfast, which I shall feel honoured by your deigning to share."

"I offer you a thousand thanks, caballero," the officer replied with a courteous bow; "but I am only a rough soldier, whose society cannot be agreeable to a lady: be kind enough, therefore, to excuse if I refuse your gracious invitation, for which, however, I feel as grateful as if I had accepted it."

"I will not press you, señor, though I should have been flattered to have you as a guest: it is settled then that we are to remain here a little while longer?"

"As long as you please, señor: I repeat that I am at your orders."

After this exchange of politeness the two speakers separated, the old gentleman re-entered the rancho, and the officer went out to give his squadron orders to bivouac.

The soldiers dismounted, picketed their horses, and began strolling about, smoking a cigarette, and looking at everything with the restless curiosity peculiar to Mexicans.

The officer whispered a few words to a private, and the latter, instead of imitating the example of his comrades, remounted his horse and went off at a gallop.

About ten in the morning, the servants of don Antonio de Carrera put the horses to the berlin, and a few minutes after the old gentleman came forth.

He gave his arm to a lady, so wrapped up in her veil and mantua that it was literally impossible to see anything of her face or divine the elegance of her form.

So soon as the young lady was comfortably seated in the berlin, don Antonio turned to the officer who had hurried up

to him.

"We will start whenever you please, señor lieutenant," he said to him.

Don Jesús bowed.

The escort mounted: the old gentleman then entered the carriage, the door of which was closed by a footman who seated himself by the side of the coachman: four other well armed valets got up behind the carriage.

"Forward!" the officer shouted.

One half the escort went in front, the other half formed the rear guard. The driver lashed his horses, and carriage and horsemen soon disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"May heaven protect them," the ventero muttered, as he crossed himself and tossed in his hand two gold ounces given him by don Antonio: "the old gentleman is a worthy man, but unfortunately don Jesús Domínguez is with him, and I am greatly afraid that his escort will be fatal to him."

CHAPTER III.

THE SALTEADORES.

In the meanwhile the carriage rolled along the Orizaba road, surrounded by its escort. But at a little distance from that town it turned off and reached by a shortcut the Puebla road, along which it advanced in the direction of the defiles of Las Cumbres: while going at full speed along the dusty road, the two travellers caroused.

The lady who accompanied the old gentleman was a girl of sixteen or seventeen years at the most; her delicate features, her blue eyes bordered by long lashes which, in

falling traced a brown semicircle on her velvety cheeks, her straight nose with its pink or flexible nostrils, her small mouth, whose coral lips when parted allowed a glimpse of her pearly teeth, her slightly dimpled chin, her pale complexion rendered even paler by the silky tresses of raven hair which surrounded her face and fell on her shoulders, produced one of those pale and attractive countenances, which are only seen in equinoctial countries, and which, while not possessing the piquancy of the frail beauties of our northern climes, have that irresistible attraction which makes one dream of the angel in the woman, and produces not only love but adoration.

Gracefully reclining in a corner of her carriage, half buried in masses of muslin, she allowed her eyes to wander pensively over the country, only answering absently and in monosyllables the remarks which her father addressed to her.

The old gentleman, though he affected a certain assurance, appeared, however, rather restless.

"I tell you, Dolores," he said, "all this is not clear in spite of the repeated affirmations of the heads of the Veracruz government, and the protection they feign to grant me. I have no confidence in them."

"Why not, papa?" the young lady asked carelessly.

"For a thousand reasons: the principal one is that I am a Spaniard, and you know that unfortunately at the present time, that name is a further motive for the hatred the Mexicans feel against Europeans generally."

"That is only too true, papa, but permit me to ask one question."

"Pray do so, Dolores."

"Well, I should like you to tell me the urgent motive which induced you to leave Veracruz suddenly, and take this journey with me, more especially, when usually you never take anyone with you on your excursions."

"The motive is very simple, my child, serious interests claim my presence at Mexico, where I must be as soon as possible. On the other hand, the political horizon is daily growing darker, and I reflected that a residence at our Hacienda del Arenal might become ere long, dangerous for our family. I therefore have resolved that, after leaving you in Puebla with our relation don Luis de Pezal, whose god-daughter you are, and who loves you dearly, to push on to Arenal, where I shall take up your brother Melchior, and convey you to the capital, where it will be easy for us to find effectual protection, in the event, unhappily too easy to foresee, of the constituted power being suddenly overthrown and that of Veracruz substituted for it."

"And you have no other motive but that, papa?" the young lady said, leaning forward, with a slight smile.

"What other motive could I have but what I have just told you, my dear Dolores?"

"You see I do not know, papa, since I ask you."

"You are a curious niña," he continued laughingly, shaking his finger at her, "you would like to make me confess my secret."

"Then you have a secret, papa?"

"That is possible; but for the present you must be satisfied with knowing so much, for I shall not tell it to you."

"Really, dear papa?"

"I pledge you my word."

"Oh, in that case I will not press you. I know too well that when you put on your big voice and knit your brows, it is useless to do so."

"You are a madcap, Dolores."

"No matter. I should have liked to know why you assumed a false name for this journey."

"Oh! I have no objection to tell you that: my name is too well known, as that of a rich man, for me to venture to carry it across country when so many bandits are swarming on the roads."

"You had no other motive?"

"No other, my dear child: I believe that is sufficient, and that prudence urged me to act as I have done."

"Very good, papa," she replied, shaking her head with a pout: "but," she suddenly exclaimed, "I fancy, papa, that the carriage is slackening its speed."

"It is true," the old gentleman answered, "what is the meaning of this?"

He pulled down the glass and thrust out his head, but could see nothing: the berlin was at this moment entering the defile of the Cumbres, and the road made so many winds, that it was impossible to see more than thirty yards before or behind. The old gentleman called up one of the servants who rode close to the carriage.

"What is the matter, Sánchez?" the traveller asked. "I fancy we are not going so fast as before."

"That is true, señor amo," Sánchez answered, "since we left the plain, we have not been advancing so rapidly, though I do not know the reason: the soldiers of our escort