

**ADVENTURES
OF
A YOUNG NATURALIST.**

**BY
LUCIEN BIART.**

EDITED AND ADAPTED BY
PARKER GILLMORE,
AUTHOR OF "ALL ROUND
THE WORLD," "GUN,
ROD, AND SADDLE,"
"ACCESSIBLE
FIELD SPORTS," ETC.

*WITH ONE HUNDRED
AND SEVENTEEN
ILLUSTRATIONS.*



Frontispiece.



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PREFACE.

There is no country on the face of the earth that possesses greater interest in the eyes of the scientific or travelled than Mexico, the scene where the adventures so graphically and clearly narrated in this volume transpired: nor is this partiality to be wondered at when we recall to memory what a lavish hand Nature has subtended to her.

Although several of our most celebrated naturalists have climbed its lofty volcanic mountains, explored its lagoons and giant rivers, and traversed its immense forests, still, from the vast extent of that country and variety of climate—caused by difference of elevation—much yet remains to be done ere the public become thoroughly conversant with its arboreal and zoological productions.

The elephant, hippopotamus, lion, and tiger, the largest and most formidable of the terrestrial mammals of the Old World, are not here to be found; but their places are well supplied by the swamp-loving tapir, the voracious alligator, the stealthy puma, and the blood-thirsty jaguar, all well worthy of the sportsman's rifle, or of the snake-visioned native warrior's weapons—for the power of destruction in these animals during life is great, while after death they either furnish valuable skins or wholesome food. Moreover, here the wolf awakes the reverberating echoes of the forest with its dismal howl; the raccoon, opossum, and squirrel pass their lives in sportive gambols; the wild and the ocellated turkeys strut about, pompous in manner, as if conscious[6] of their handsome plumage, while the timid deer and shaggy-coated bison roam over prairies or through woodland glades, as yet unacquainted with the report of the white man's destructive fire-arms.

Can it, therefore, be surprising that our little hero should have craved to be permitted to have a sight of this new land, so rich in the prospect of adventure? How he behaved himself throughout the numerous ordeals to which he was submitted, suffice it for me to say that his conduct was worthy of the representative of any nationality, and such as was calculated to make all parents proud [of](#) their offspring; for whether suffering from thirst or hunger, being persecuted by noxious insects, straying in the woods, even when within reach of the fiercest carnivora or in the presence of the deadliest reptiles, he never for a moment hesitated in performing his seniors' instructions, lost his courage, or, better still, an opportunity of improving his mind.

That the young English reader may benefit as much by the perusal of this work as Master Lucien, otherwise "Sunbeam," did by his journey through the Cordilleras of Mexico, and that they may enjoy the information herein imparted upon the wonderful works of the Creator, is the sincere wish of

The Editor.



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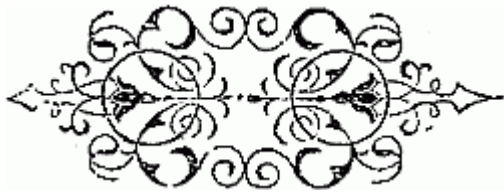
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INTRODUCTION.

The evening before leaving for one of my periodical excursions, I was putting in order my guns, my insect-cases, and all my travelling necessities, when my eldest son, a lad nine years old, came running to me in that wheedling manner—using that

irresistible diplomacy of childhood which imposes on fathers and mothers so many troublesome treaties, and which children so well know how to assume when they desire to obtain a favor.

"Are you going to make as long a journey as you did last month?" he asked.

"Longer, I think; for, as we are so soon leaving for Europe, I want to complete my collection as rapidly as possible.[14] I know you will be a good boy during my absence, and obedient to your mother. You will think of me sometimes, will you not?"

"I should much prefer *not* to think of you," he responded.

"You would rather, then, that I staid at Orizava?"

"Oh no; I should like you to go, and—to go with you."

"What can you be thinking of? Before we were a mile on the road you would be knocked up, complaining of heat, thirst, fatigue—"

"That's quite a mistake, dear father. I know I should be very useful to you, if you would only take me. I could pick up wood, light the fire, and look after the cooking, besides catching butterflies and insects, both for your collection and mine."

"That's all very well; but the first time you were scratched by a thorn you would cry."

"Oh father! I promise you I will never cry, except when—I can't help it."

I could not resist smiling at this answer.

"Then it is a settled thing, and I am to go with you," exclaimed Lucien.

"We must consult your mother, and if she sees no objection, I—"

The child ran off without allowing me to finish my sentence.

While I went on cleaning my guns, I found that I was pleading with myself in favor of the little would-be traveller. I also remembered that when I was only seven years old I had travelled long distances on foot in company with my father, and to this early habit owed much of the power of accomplishing dangerous and fatiguing journeys, which would have frightened stronger men. I even persuaded myself that it would be useful, before leaving Mexico, to[15] impress the memory of my son with a sight of some of the grand scenes of tropical nature, so that he should retain correct ideas of the wonderful country in which his infancy had been spent. I moreover knew that l'Encuerado, the gallant Indian who had been my servant for so many years, perfectly adored his young master, and would watch over him just as I should, and thus ward off

any possible mishaps. On the other hand, I risked inspiring my son with that love of travel and adventure which had contributed materially to my scientific collection, but very little to my fortune. Nevertheless, what a wholesome influence is exercised over the mind by an almost unceasing struggle with the difficulties that beset one's course through an unknown country. Both the mind and body of my son must surely benefit by such an excursion, which might be curtailed if desirable. Soon after the boy returned, accompanied by his mother.

"What is all this about a journey, for which my consent is the only requisite?" asked my wife.

"Mine is needed too," I answered.

"Why not take him, dear? L'Encuerado has promised me that he will not lose sight of him for an instant."

"What! do *you* take his part?"

"He does long so much to go with you," she said.

"Be it so," I replied. "Get your clothes ready, for we must be off the day after to-morrow at daybreak."

Lucien was almost beside himself with joy. He rushed about the house from one end to the other; gave the servants much unnecessary trouble; leggings, boots, and a game-bag, he wanted; also a sword, a knife, insect-cases—in fact, a whole multitude of requirements. L'Encuerado, who was almost as rejoiced as the lad, cut him a travelling-staff, as strong and light as was requisite, and made him other auxiliaries necessary on such excursions. From this moment^[16] forward, Lucien was constantly running and climbing about all the rooms and the yards round the house, to accustom himself, as he said, to the fatigue of a long journey. At dinner-time he would take nothing but bread and water, in order to prepare his system for the meagre fare of the bivouac. In fact, I had to quiet him down by recommending more coolness to his excited little brain.

The eve of our departure arrived, and several friends came to bid me farewell. My son told them of all the great things he had determined to achieve—how he would crush the heads of scorpions, and with his sword cut down trees or kill serpents.

"If I tumble over the rocks," said he, "I shall only laugh at my bruises; and if we meet with any tigers—"[\[A\]](#)

An extremely warlike attitude terminated this sentence.

Ceasing at length from want of further words, he would very willingly have reduced to silence, with his sword, those who disapproved of my project of taking into the forests and savannahs my child of nine years old, and exposing him to all the unknown dangers of savage life—to fatigue, rain, and all kinds of maladies! Why, it appeared like tempting Providence, and risking, for mere amusement, the life, or at least the health, of my child. The unanimity of these reflections began to shake my resolution, and I expressed myself to that effect.

"Oh father!" cried Lucien, "are you going to break your word to me?"

"No," I replied; "neither now nor ever. I want you to become a man, so you shall go. But be off to bed, for you must be ready to start by four o'clock in the morning."

I had given notice of my intended tour to my friend^[17] François Sumichrast, a Swiss *savant*, well known for his discoveries in natural history, in whose company I had undertaken several journeys. About ten o'clock at night, I began to fancy my letter of information had miscarried, when a knock at the door startled me, and I soon recognized the happy voice of my friend. He had come expressly from Cordova, in order to make one in our little expedition. I told him all my doubts and fears about my boy, but he quite took the part of the young traveller; almost what I might have expected from a companion of Töpffer.

"Come here," he cried to Lucien, who, half-undressed, had just peeped in at the door.

The boy ran to him, and my friend, whose stature much exceeded the average, lifted him up and embraced him as an ally.

"At your age," said Sumichrast, "I had made the tour of Switzerland, my bag on my back, and had tried my teeth on bears'-steaks. I predict that you will behave like a man. Shall I be wrong?"

"Oh no, M. Sumichrast."

"Can you live without eating and drinking?"

"I will do all you do."

"That's well; now go to bed. If you keep your word, when we return in a month's time you'll be a prodigy."

Next morning Lucien was up and ready long before day-break, and complained of our tardiness. He was dressed in a jacket and breeches of blue cloth, with his Mexican cloak over them; he carried in his belt a sword ready sharpened, to cut his way through the creeping plants; while over his shoulder was passed the strap of a game-

pouch, containing a knife, a cup, and a change of under-clothing. The broad-brimmed hat, or *sombrero*, on his head, gave him a most determined air. I had almost forgotten the famous travelling-staff which for the last two days had been resounding^[18] against all the floors in the house. L'Encuerado, a Mistec Indian, and an old tiger-hunter, who, through a thousand dangers faced in common, had become much attached to my person, at last made his appearance, clad in a leathern jacket and breeches, which had given him his name of "*Encuerado*."^[B] The brave and adventurous Indian was almost beside himself with joy at the idea of conducting into the forest the child whom he had known from his cradle. On his back he fastened a basket containing our main stock of provisions—such as coffee, salt, pepper, dried maize, cakes, etc. Lucien's younger brother and sister had jumped out of bed, and were dancing all round us: the latter seemed somewhat sad and uneasy, but the former was dissatisfied, manfully asserting that he, too, was quite big enough to go with us.

At the last moment my poor wife lost all her courage, and regretted she had ever given her consent; but when Lucien saw the tears which his departure had called forth, he became heroic in his self-denial, throwing aside his hat and stick.

"Mother," he cried, embracing her in his arms, "I will not go away if it makes you cry."

"All right, then; I will go instead," said his brother Emile, who ran and picked up the stick and hat, and then walked towards the outer door, utterly disregarding his bedroom costume.

"No, no," said my wife; "I will not be the means of depriving you of so much pleasure."

The kind mother again kissed her child, and commended him anew to our joint care.

I led off my little companion; but when we got into the court-yard, I had to exercise all my authority to make his^[19] younger brother give up the stick and hat he had taken possession of. When restitution was effected, the two children kissed each other, and parted friends.

At last the outer gate was passed, and our footsteps rang through the quiet streets of Orizava. We were commencing the first stage of our journey in pursuit of scientific discoveries.



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CHAPTER I.

WHO WE ARE.—GRINGALET.—SUNRISE.—THE SUGAR-CANE.—A HALT.

It was the 20th April, 1864. The clock of the church of the convent of Saint Joseph de Grace chimed 4 A.M. just as we turned into the main street that leads out of the town.

Sumichrast took the lead. Tall in stature, noble in mien, and broad-shouldered, he was, in spite of his blue eyes and fair hair, the perfect representative of moral and bodily strength. I was always in the habit of permitting him to lead the way, when, in any of our excursions, it was necessary to favorably impress the imagination of the Indians. He was distinguished as an ornithologist, and was never so much at home as in the midst of the forests; in fact, he often[21] regretted that he had not been born an Indian. His gravity entirely devoid of sadness, his skill in shooting, and his silent laugh,

often led me to compare him to Cooper's "Leather-Stocking;" but it was "Leather-Stocking" become a man of the world and of science.



Next let me describe my son. Like all children, he was imitative, so had commenced very early to make a collection of insects, and this was sufficient to give him a precocious taste for natural history; but in his character he was earnest and reflective, and very eager for knowledge. Sumichrast took pleasure in the boy's intelligence, and often amused himself by arguing with him. From the flashes of[22] childish humor which he would display on such occasions, my friend sometimes gave him the nickname of "Sun-beam."

Next to the child came l'Encuerado, an Indian of the Mistec race—a strange mixture of delicacy, simplicity, kindness, candor, and obstinacy. In the interval that had elapsed since I first met him, twelve years before, in the Terre-Chaude, he had become my friend as much as my servant. But he was never happy in a town, and was always praising wild life, even the inconveniences of the solitudes in which he had been born.



"What a pity that it is so dark," said Lucien, whom Sumichrast was leading by the hand.[23]

"For what reason do you wish for daylight?" I asked.

"Why? Because every one is asleep now, and none of my friends will see me pass with my sword, my gourd, and my game-pouch."

"So you think that your travelling-costume would make your companions envious?—that's not a kind feeling."

"No, father; I should like them to see me, certainly; but I don't want to give pain to any one."

We passed along the foot of Borrego, the mountain which has become so famous, owing to the conflict which took place there between sixty French soldiers and two thousand Mexicans, and had just reached the gateway of Angostura when a dog ran past, but soon returned, barking and fawning upon us in every way. It was Gringalet, an elegantly although strongly made greyhound, which had been a companion of my boy's from infancy, l'Encuerado having brought him up "by hand" for his young master. Gringalet was an orphan from the time of his birth, and had found in the Indian a most attentive foster-parent. Three times a day he gave his adopted child milk through a piece of rag tied over the neck of a bottle. The dog had grown up by the side of his young master; many a time, doubtless, he had snatched from his hands the half-eaten cake, but such casualties were only a temporary check upon their mutual attachment.

He manifested, therefore, a decided preference for three objects—Lucien, his nurse, and bottles in general. I was at first rather vexed that the poor beast should have taken upon himself the liberty of joining our expedition, so I tried to drive him back. Gringalet ran to take refuge by the side of Lucien, with ears laid back, and one paw raised; and looked at me with such mild eyes, so full of supplication, that I could not find it in my heart to carry out my intention. Sumichrast and l'Encuerado both interceded for the animal, which, crouching and wagging his tail, came[24] and lay down humbly at my feet. Lucien, who was afraid I should behave harshly to his favorite, hid his face in his hands. I was vanquished.

"Come along, then, and let us take Gringalet!" I said.

So I caressed the dog, which, clearly seeing that he had gained his cause, bounded along the road in the most extravagant leaps, clearly indicative of his emotions of pleasure. In spite of all his efforts to keep them back, tears escaped from Lucien's eyes, and I had to turn my head away to avoid having to recall the promise he made to refrain from crying. But, nevertheless, although I wished him to learn how to bear stoically any physical suffering, I had no desire to quench in him the evidences of a feeling heart—that potent source of our sweetest pleasure and our bitterest sorrow.

The gates of the town were still closed. On arriving in front of the guard-house, I rapped at the window to awake the old man, the guardian of the keys of the town.

"Won't he open the gate for us? Shall we be obliged to go home again? Can't we start to-day, M. Sumichrast?" eagerly asked Lucien.

"Keep quiet," replied Sumichrast; "the porter is an old man, and we are disturbing him earlier than we ought, which always puts him a little out of temper. However active we may be, it is a good thing to know 'how to wait.'"

At last the door-keeper made his appearance, the chains dropped one by one, the heavy gate turned on its hinges, and Lucien was the first to spring out into the open road. The sky was starless, the morning dew chilled our blood, and we felt that uncomfortable feeling which, in the tropics, affects the traveller just at the period when night gives place to day. I led Lucien by the hand, lest, in the dim light, he might fall. He shivered with cold, but was unwilling to complain; I stepped on quickly in order that he[25] might get warm. Perhaps, just at this moment, he regretted his little bed, and thought of the cup of warm chocolate which his mother often used to bring him as soon as he awoke; but, unmurmuring, he retained his place by my side.

Beyond the village of Ingenio, a brisk south wind blew the dust in our faces and retarded our speed. All round the trees bent before the squall, and the large plantain

leaves flew about, torn into ribbons. We now turned to the right, and crossed a prairie. L'Encuerado required breath, for his load weighed at least eighty pounds, although, like Æsop's burden, it would surely get lighter at every meal. An enormous rock, which had tumbled down from one of the surrounding mountains centuries past, offered us a retreat sheltered from the wind. At this moment a line of purple edging the eastern horizon announced the dawn of day.

"Come here," I called to Lucien.

And taking the lad between my knees, I said,

"You see that bright band of light which looks almost as if the horizon was on fire? Well, from the middle of it the sun is just going to rise. At this very moment, in Europe, it is almost noonday; but, as recompense, they will have dark night when it is three o'clock in the afternoon here, and we shall be pushing along, overwhelmed with the heat of an almost vertical sun. The red line is now getting wider and paler; it is more like a golden mist. But turn round and look at the mountain tops."

The child uttered a half-surprised cry; although we were in comparative obscurity, the ridges of the Cordilleras seemed all on fire.

"Do you understand that phenomenon?" asked Sumichrast.

"Yes; for I know the earth is round, and these mountains,[26] which are higher than we are, of course first catch the rays of the sun."

The day broke, and a burning glow suffused the horizon; in a few minutes the sun rose and inundated us with light. The birds began to chant their morning song, and the eagles, careering from every mountain top, soared above our heads. The sunbeams twinkled through the dew-drops, and the grass of the prairie seemed decked with diamonds. Black vultures, which soared even higher than the eagles and the kites, traced out in the blue sky the immense curves of their majestic flight. On every bush insects spread their gauzy wings; perhaps they felt that not a minute should be lost by beings whose birth, life, and death are all comprised in one single day.

"Oh!" cried Lucien, "as soon as we get home I shall tell mamma how beautiful is sunrise! Is it not a shame that so many of us sleep through the hour when this lovely prospect can only be enjoyed?"

I was obliged to cut short the little fellow's admiration—an admiration I also shared. Each resumed his load; and now, in spite of the wind, we all felt eager to advance. Gringalet, as glad as we were at the return of day, frisked round Lucien, barking, jumping over ditches, and rolling in the dust in his wild gambols. Our young

companion began imitating his frolics; but I soon called him to order, for our day's journey was to be as much as six to seven leagues, and it was necessary to prevent Lucien fatiguing himself unnecessarily.

"You always go either too quickly or too slowly," said Sumichrast to the boy; "travellers, like soldiers, must walk at a regular pace, so as to reach their halting-place without more than necessary fatigue. Come—form in line! That's well; now, on we go!"[27] was most amusing to see him trying to keep a pace quite at



"We were just then passing through a plantation."

Lucien measured his steps by those of his instructor. It[29] variance with the length of his short legs.

"Halt!" cried Sumichrast; "you can hardly imagine your legs are as long as mine. Perhaps in about ten years' time you may enjoy that privilege; but, in the mean time, walk naturally—without either effort or hurry. One, two, three!—now you are perfect. Keep on without noticing me; you can't walk at my pace, so I must take to yours."

As our journey was to extend to the distance of three hundred leagues, it was quite requisite that the boy should accustom himself to a regular step. After several attempts this was accomplished, and all progressed together.

We now directed our course towards the heights. Our intention was to make our way into the Cordillera, and, passing round the volcano of Orizava, to descend into the savannahs beyond, slanting off to the left so as ultimately to reach the sea. Then we thought of traversing the prairies and forests of the Terre-Chaude, so as again to come to our starting-point through the mountains of Songolica. This circuit would represent a journey of a hundred and fifty leagues as the crow flies, or at least three hundred leagues, reckoning all the circuits and bends we should be obliged to make. During this long expedition, we had made up our minds to seek, when opportunity offered, the hospitality of any Indian villages that might come in our road, and only when absolutely necessary to camp in the open air.

About eleven, the heat became overpowering, and Lucien began to inquire about breakfast. We were just then passing through a plantation, I might almost say a forest of sugar-canes. The stems of the plants were either of a yellowish hue or veined with blue, and were more than six feet high. The latter kind will ultimately supersede its rival; for the cultivators assert that, although not so large,[30] it affords a much more certain crop. L'Encuerado, seizing his *machete* (a straight and a short cutlass, indispensable to the inhabitants of the Terre-Chaude), cut down a magnificent stem, and, peeling it, offered each of us a piece. The sugar-cane is extremely hard, and it is necessary to cut it up in order to break the cellules in which the sweet juice is contained. My companions set to work to chew the pith of the valuable plant; and even Gringalet seemed to be just as fond of it as they were.

Not far from the cane-field, some Indians were working on a new plantation. The ground was covered with ashes. The foreman explained to us that when the canes are cut down, the first thing is to pull off the long leaves, which are left on the ground. In eight days this rubbish is dried by the tropical sun; they then set them on fire, and the ashes which result serve as manure. Five or six Aztecs were cultivating this apparently sterile ground by means of a primitive kind of plough, made of a mere stake attached to circular discs of wood forming spokeless wheels; it was drawn by two oxen yoked together.

Sumichrast took Lucien by the hand.

"In future," said he, "when you crunch a lump of sugar, you shall know something of the manufacture of what you are eating. The sugar-cane is called, in Latin, *Saccharum officinale*, that is, 'druggist's sugar,' because the product of this plant was so rare that it was sold only at the druggists' shops. The plant itself is said to be a native of India, and is, as you see, a tuft of vegetation, from which spring six to twenty tall stalks, with joints varying, both in number and in distance, from each other. The most esteemed

variety, the Tahiti cane, is striped with violet. The specimen you are looking at is one of the most remarkable as regards size, for it must be nearly thirteen feet high."

"It is like a stalk of maize," said the boy.[31]

"That's true, except that maize has only one stem. Look, there's an Indian about to cut down the very plant I was showing you; he has severed it through obliquely at a single blow, as near the ground as possible. Now he is stripping off the leaves, and with another blow of his weapon lops away the green top, which is used for fodder. Next, he cuts it in lengths, taking care to sever it between the knots, as they are required for planting new ground."

"Planting!" repeated Lucien; "the knots are not seed?"

"No, Master 'Sunbeam;' the seed of the sugar-cane comes to maturity too slowly. It takes four years to produce a plant from it which is profitable. Now, as young fellows of your kind are rather numerous, and consume a good many preserves and sugar-plums, it is highly necessary to devise some rapid method of supplying the sugar you devour. This method has been found out. Each of these pieces of cane will be stuck into the earth, and the knot, from which in the open air the leaves spring, will send down roots into the soil. Small as it is, it will grow vigorously; and in a year, or eighteen months at most, it will have produced a dozen stalks quite as fine as the one you have been looking at."

During this long explanation l'Encuerado, who, on account of his load, disliked standing still, had kept moving, so we had to increase our pace to catch him up. As we were passing on, Lucien saw the Indian planting the very pieces of cane he had just observed cut up. Ere long we came upon a fresh plantation, in which the tender shoots, almost like grass, appeared over the ground. Sumichrast dug a little hole round one of the plants, and showed to his wondering pupil that the fragment of the stem was already provided with small rootlets.

Suddenly, at the turn of a path, I was saluted by a man[32] on horseback. It was the steward of the estate that we were crossing.

"Hallo! Don Luciano, where are you off to with all that train?" cried the new-comer.

"To visit the forest of the Cordillera," I replied.

"May you travel safely! but is the young gentleman going with you?"

"Yes, to be sure. Good-bye, Antonio, till we meet again!"

"Till we meet again? By my word, you shall not say that just yet. The goodwife has some eggs and fried beans ready for breakfast; and I ought to have some bottles of Spanish wine, in which we'll drink to your pleasant journey, unless you're too proud to accept the hospitality of a poor man."

Being very hungry, with pleasure we accepted this cordial invitation. The steward further insisted upon taking our little traveller up in front of him. The child was only too pleased.

"Oh dear!" said Sumichrast; "why, it's spoiling the boy at the outset."

"It will be half a league the less for his poor legs," said Antonio; and, spurring his horse, he galloped off with Lucien to get our breakfast ready.

Gringalet was in consternation at his young master's departure. Raising his intelligent face, he seemed as if he wished to question us, and pricked up his ears as if to listen to the sound of the horse's feet dying away in the distance. At last he raised a plaintive howl, and started off in pursuit.

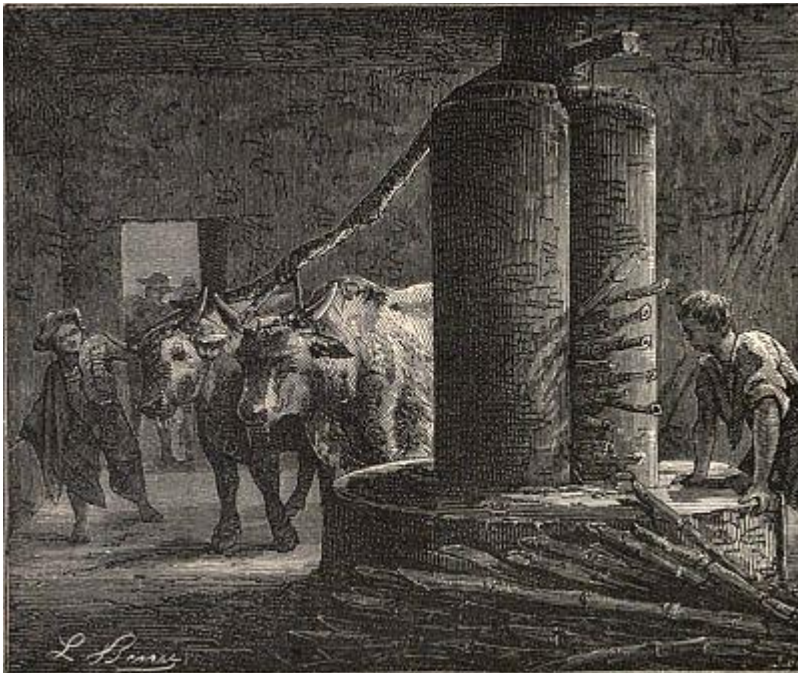
Surprised at not seeing l'Encuerado, I turned back, fancying he had remained behind. I was expecting to see him appear, when Sumichrast burst out laughing. At a turn of the road he had caught a sight of the horseman, with the[33] dog on one side and the Indian on the other, who, in spite of his load, kept up without difficulty.

This feat on the part of my servant did not much surprise me, for I do not think that in the whole world there are any more indefatigable runners than the Mistec Indians.

At twelve o'clock, just as the bell was calling home the laborers, I entered the courtyard of the sugar-mill, where I caught sight of my youngster sitting on the ground, with his dog at his feet, looking with rapture at some ducks that were enjoying themselves in a muddy pool.



[34]



CHAPTER II.

SUGAR.—GRINGALET IN THE MOLASSES TANK.—L'ENCUERADO'S OBSTINATE IDEA.—AN INDIAN SUPPER.

The breakfast was a cheerful one, thanks to the Spanish wine spoken of by our host. The Indian laborers, with their wives and children, assembled in inquisitive groups round the windows of the dwelling. Lucien certainly carried the day, for he it was that

they chiefly sought to see. As for Gringalet, he was much less cordially received by his brother-dogs belonging to the place; consequently, he scarcely left his young master's side, and showed his teeth incessantly.

Sumichrast wishing, before we set out again, to explain to his pupil how sugar was made, took him to the mill, situated[35] in a wide rotunda. Here two upright wooden cylinders, fitting close to one another, revolved on a pivot, set in action by means of two oxen yoked together, crushing the canes which an Aztec[C] was introducing between them. The machine groaned, and seemed almost ready to fall to pieces under the impetus of the powerful animals, which were urged on both by voice and gesture. Lucien remarked that the canes were cut in lengths of about a yard, and bevelled off at the ends, so as to be more readily caught between the two cylinders. After having been subjected to this heavy pressure, they came out squeezed almost dry, and the sweet juice, or *sirup*, flowed down into a large trough hollowed out of the trunk of a tree.

As soon as this receptacle was full of juice, an enormous valve was opened, and the turbid, muddy-looking liquid flowed along a trench, and emptied into a brick reservoir. On its way it passed through the meshes of a coarse bag, and was thus roughly filtered; it was then conveyed into immense coppers placed over a hot furnace. The fragments of crushed cane, having been rapidly dried in the sun, were used to feed the fire which boiled the juice so lately squeezed out of them.

Near the aloe-fibre filtering-bag, in front of which the morsels of cane and rubbish constantly accumulated, stood a little boy about twelve years old, whose duty it was to keep the passage clear. Lucien pulled my coat, to call my attention to the fact that the lad had only one arm.

[36]

"How did you lose your left arm, pobricito?" I asked.

"Between the crushers, señor."

"Was it your own fault?"

"Alas! yes. My father looked after the machine, and I helped him to drive the oxen; and he had forbidden my going near the cylinders. One day he went away for a few minutes, and I tried to put a piece of cane between the rollers; but my finger caught, and my arm was drawn in and crushed."

"It was a terrible punishment for your disobedience," I said.

"More terrible than you think, señor. My father died six months ago, and I have several little brothers. If I had both my arms, I could earn a quarter of a piastre a day, and also help my mother."

"How much do they give you for watching this filtering-bag from morning till night?"

"Only a medio," [\[D\]](#) he answered.

I looked hard at Lucien, who threw himself into my arms.

"Oh! I will always obey you," he cried, with emotion; "but do allow me to give all the money in my purse to this little boy."

"Give him a piastre, my boy; we shall meet with others in want, and you must reserve something for them."

"Oh! young gentleman," said the poor mutilated lad, looking with wonder at the coin which represented sixteen days' work, "we will all pray for you!"

And he hurried to clear out the bag, which was already too full.

The process adopted in the sugar-mill we speak of was of most primitive simplicity. The European manufacturers[37] employ iron cylinders turned by steam or water power; also lift and force pumps, which quickly convey the sap into the basins in which it is to be clarified by fermentation.

But for comprehending easily all the operations required in the extraction of sugar, Antonio's *hacienda*, in which every thing was done before our eyes, was much preferable to any of the modern mills provided with all kinds of improved apparatus.

When our young traveller saw the thick, muddy, and turbid liquid, which was being stirred up by a gigantic "agitator," he could hardly believe that it could ever produce the beautiful white crystal with which he was so well acquainted.

"But where's the sugar?" he eagerly asked.

"There, in front of you," replied Sumichrast. "The sugar-cane, like all other vegetables, contains a certain quantity of liquid, in which the sugar is held in a state of solution; if this is removed, prismatic crystals immediately form. Look now! the contents of the copper are just beginning to boil, and are covered with a blackish scum, which is carefully skimmed off; for in three or four days, when it has fermented, it will produce, by means of distillation, the ardent spirit which l'Encuerado is so fond of. The cloud of steam which is rising above the copper shows that the juice is evaporating; in a few

minutes more it will be converted into sirup, and will ultimately form crystals. Come and see the result of the last operation."

We entered a large gallery, in which a number of moulds—made of baked earth and shaped like reversed sugar-loaves—were ranged in lines under the beams, like bottles in a bottle-rack. Into these, which had been previously moistened, some laborers were pouring the boiling sirup. A little farther on we were shown what had been boiled the day before, and was crystallizing, assisted in the process by an Indian, who stirred it slowly. From a trough, open at the[38] lower end, a thick liquid was flowing, called "molasses," or treacle, which is used for making rum, gingerbread, and for other purposes. The lowest part of the sugar-loaf seemed, also, to be yellow and sticky.

Passing through a dark passage, Lucien noticed two half-naked laborers, who were moistening clay and converting it into a kind of dough.

"What a nasty mess!" he cried, with a self-satisfied tone. "What would mamma say, if she was here? It was only the other day she gave my brother and sister a good scolding."

"What was it for?" I asked.

"For mixing up mud to build a town and reservoir in the long passage in our house."

"What part did you take in it?"

"Oh, I was architect; but I was scolded as much as the others."

"That I can readily believe," replied Sumichrast, who could hardly keep his gravity; "but come, let us follow these laborers, and you will soon see that they are not mixing up this mud for mere pleasure."

To his great surprise, our little traveller saw them filling up, with a dark-colored liquid, the empty part of the moulds, from which the molasses had drained away.

"They are spoiling the sugar-loaves!" he cried.

"Quite the contrary; they are going to whiten it. The water that is contained in the clay will filter gradually through the sugar, and will drive before it the molasses that is left round the crystals; and this operation, several times repeated, will produce that spongy kind of sugar which is well known to retain a flavor of the cane, rather disliked by Europeans accustomed to the finer products of their refineries."

The only department we now had to visit was the "drying-room,"[39] where the sugar-loaves are piled up to dry, and wait for a purchaser.

In our way thither we nearly fell into an immense reservoir, level with the surface of the ground, and full of molasses; the scum floating on the top so exactly resembled the rough and sticky floor of the sugar-mill that it was easy to make a mistake. Gringalet was unfortunate enough to be the cause of our avoiding this accident. Restless, like all his kind, he ran smelling about in every direction, just as if he was trying to find some lost object: forcing his way between our legs, to get in front of us, he suddenly disappeared in the thick liquid. I pulled him out directly; but as soon as he was on his feet, he rolled over and over on the ground, so that when he stood up his coat was bristling with pieces of straw and wood; in fact, he scarcely looked like a dog at all. I called him towards the pond outside, but the poor brute was quite blind and confused, and did not seem to hear. As a matter of course, all the laborers raised shouts of laughter; but poor Lucien, fancying that his dog was going to die, followed him in despair. Gringalet, no doubt wishing to comfort his young master, leaped upon him and covered him with caresses, and of course with saccharine matter, in which he so lately had a bath. As it was too late for any other course, I made up my mind to laugh, like every one else. While l'Encuerado was washing the dog, our hostess cleaned the boy's clothes, soon after which we resumed our journey.

Don Antonio, like a real Mexican, pitied us for having to travel on foot like Indians; he especially commiserated our young companion, and thought, indeed, that we were very cruel.

"He must learn to use his legs; that's the reason why God gave them to him," said Sumichrast, who delighted in an argument with the steward.[40]

"What good are horses, then?"

"To break your neck. Besides, there are plenty of infirmities in life without making one out of the horse."

"The horse an infirmity!" cried the Mexican.

"Yes, certainly—among your caste at least; for you could no more do without a horse than a cripple without his crutch."

Don Antonio whistled without making any reply, and, untying his horse, took Lucien up in front, and accompanied us for more than a league. At last, as his duties called him home, he shook us by the hand and turned back. Even after we had lost sight of him, we could still hear him wishing us a pleasant journey.

We had to cross a wide prairie; the heat was suffocating, and we marched on side by side in dead silence. Lucien's walking was much hindered by his game-pouch and

gourd, which, in spite of all his efforts, would work round in front of him. I soon noticed that he had got rid of the troublesome gear.

"Hallo!" I cried, "what have you done with your provisions?"

"L'Encuerado wished to carry them for me."

"L'Encuerado's load is quite heavy enough now, and you must get accustomed to your own. In a few days you won't feel it. Habit makes many things easy which at first seem impossible."

"Señor," said l'Encuerado, "Chanito (this was the name he gave to Lucien) is tired, and this is his first journey; I'll give him back all his things to-morrow."

"It will be much better for him to get accustomed to them now. Give him back his baggage, it is not too heavy for him; if you don't, you will be the one to be scolded."

The Indian grumbled before he obeyed; then, taking the boy by the hand, dropped behind, muttering to him:[41]

"When you don't want to walk any more, Chanito, you must tell me, and you shall ride on the top of my pack."

"No," said I, turning round; "if you do any thing of the kind, I will send both of you home."

"My shoulders are my own," replied the Indian, earnestly; "surely I have a right to employ them as I choose."

Sumichrast burst out laughing at this logic, and I was obliged to go on in front, or I should have done the same. Nevertheless, I feared lest Lucien should learn, on the very first day of his journey, to depend too much on l'Encuerado's kindness. I was, therefore, pleased to hear him refuse several times the Indian's offer of putting him up on his pack, an idea which the faithful fellow persisted in with an obstinacy which I had long known him to possess. A little time after—thinking, doubtless, that his dignity compelled him to prove that he was easily able to increase the weight of his load—he seized Gringalet, who was walking close behind lolling out his tongue, and throwing the dog up on his back, and commencing an Indian trot, ran by us with a triumphant look. Gringalet was at first taken by surprise, and, raising a cry of distress, wanted to jump down; but he soon sat quiet enough, without displaying any uneasiness, to the great joy of my son, who was much amused at the incident.

The plain which we were crossing seemed absolutely interminable.

"It's no use our walking," said Lucien; "we don't appear to make any advance."

"Fortunately, you are mistaken," replied Sumichrast. "Look in front of you, and you will see that the trees on ahead, which a short time ago looked like one uninterrupted mass of foliage, can now be discerned separately."

"You mean the forest which we can see from here?"

"What you take for a forest is nothing but a few trees scattered about the plain."[42]

"Isn't M. Sumichrast wrong in that, father?"

"No, my boy; but those who have more experience than you might well be mistaken, for when objects are seen at a distance they always seem to blend together in a group. This morning, for instance, when we were walking along the main road, you were always exclaiming that it ended in a point; but you were convinced that your eyes deceived you. It is just the same now: these trees appear to be farther apart in proportion as we approach them; and you will be quite surprised presently when you see how distant they are from each other. The same illusion is produced by the stars, which are millions of miles apart, and yet appear so thick in the sky, that your brother Emile was regretting, the other night, that he was not tall enough to grasp a handful of them."

"And don't forget," added Sumichrast, "that light and imagination often combine to deceive us."

"Just as in the fable of the 'Camels and the floating sticks.'"

"Bravo! my young scholar; you've heard that fable?"

"Yes. One evening I was going into a dimly-lighted room, and I fancied I saw a great gray man seated in a chair; I cried out, and ran away, afraid. Then papa took me by the hand and led me into the dark room again, and I found that the giant which had frightened me so much was nothing but a pair of trousers, thrown over the back of an arm-chair. The next day mamma made me learn the fable of the 'Camels.'"



"At last, lagging a little, our party reached the foot of the mountains."

[43]I restrained his ardor, as I wished to keep our boxes andOn our road I called Lucien's attention to a small thorny shrub, a kind of mimosa, called *huizachi* by the Indians, who use its pods for dyeing black cloth, and for making a tolerably useful ink. The plain assumed by degrees a less monotonous aspect. Butterflies began to hover round us, and our young naturalist wanted to commence insect-hunting.[45] needles free for the rarer species which we might expect to find as soon as we had reached more uninhabited districts. At last, lagging a little, our party reached the foot of the mountains.

It was now five o'clock; night was coming on, so it was highly necessary to look out for shelter. We came in view of a bamboo-hut in the nick of time. An old Indian was reclining in front of it, warming his meagre limbs in the rays of the setting sun, clad in nothing but a pair of drawers and a hat with a torn brim. He rose as we came near, and proffered us hospitality. His wife, whose costume consisted of a cotton shirt edged with red thread, came running in answer to his call, and was quite in raptures at the

prettiness of the "little white traveller," who completely ingratiated himself by saluting her in her own language. We had accomplished a journey of seven leagues, although Lucien, thanks to Don Antonio's horse, had not walked quite so far.

The aborigines set before us rice and beans. After this frugal repast, washed down with cold water, I wanted Lucien to lie down on a large mat; but the restless little being took advantage of his elders being comfortably stretched out to sleep, and ran off to see our hostess's fowls roosting for the night on a dead tree, and then to prowls up and down in company with l'Encuerado. The latter had ferreted out a three-corded guitar which was in the hut, and strummed away at the same tune for hours together—no doubt to the great pleasure of the boy, although to us it was quite the reverse.

At last our bedding was unrolled, and I enjoined repose on all. Gringalet couched down in the hut, at the feet of his young master. L'Encuerado, however, preferred sleeping in the open air, only too happy, as he said, to see the sky above, and to feel the wind blow straight into his face without having to be filtered through walls and windows.

[46]



CHAPTER III.

WAKING UP IN THE MORNING.—THE PIGMY WORLD OF LILLIPUT.—L'ENCUERADO AND THE BOTTLES.—MASSACRE OF THISTLES.—THE CHARCOAL-BURNING INDIANS.

I rose long before day and woke my companion. Lucien rubbed his eyes two or three times, trying in vain to make out where he was. After some moments, drawing the coverlet over him, he turned round to go to sleep again.

"Now, then, young Lazybones!" I cried, "don't you hear the cock crowing, telling us we ought to be on our road? Jump up and look round, and you will see the birds and the insects are already busy."

The child got up, appearing half stupefied, and stretched himself with a long yawn.[47]

"Oh, papa!" he said, "I ache all over; I'm sure I shall never be able to walk."

"You are quite mistaken," I replied, half supporting him. "You only feel a little tired and stiff; your limbs will very soon work as freely as ever. Go and warm yourself by the fire, where our kind hostess is preparing coffee."

The little fellow did as he was told; but he limped sadly.

"Do your legs feel like mine?" he asked of l'Encuerado.

"No, Chanito; we did not walk far enough yesterday for that."

"You can't mean that we haven't walked far? Papa says that we are now seven leagues from Orizava."

"Yes; that may seem a great deal to you, and perhaps too much; that is why I wanted to put you up on the top of my pack. Now, come, let me see where you suffer."

"All over my limbs, but particularly inside my knees."

"Wait a minute, and I'll soon cure you."

L'Encuerado then laid Lucien down in front of the fire, and began to rub him after the Indian method, vigorously shampooing the whole of his body. Next he made him walk and run with the longest strides he could take; and, after repeating this process, brought him a cup of boiling coffee. Having been revived and strengthened in this way, the lad quite recovered his sprightliness, and soon asked when we were going to start.

I gave a small present to the old couple who had so kindly accommodated us, and our little party began its second day's work; Gringalet sniffing the breeze, and evidently enjoying the excursion as much as any of the party.

When the sun rose, the sky was covered with grayish clouds, driven along quickly by a north wind; but the weather was cool, and well adapted to walking. A limestone mountain rose right in front of us, the slope of which we had to climb; but ere we reached the top, we halted at[48] least twenty times to take breath. Our little companion, with his head bent down towards the ground, struggled to retain his place by our side. At last we reached the summit, and felt at liberty to rest.

Casting a glance on the plain beneath us, the boy surveyed a vast prairie, dotted over with clumps of bushes. He silently contemplated the panorama which was spread out beneath, although he failed to completely comprehend all that he saw.

"Look at those black spots moving about over the plain," said he.

"They are oxen," I replied.

"Oxen! Why they are scarcely as big as Gringalet."

"Don't you know that you must not trust to appearances? Recollect the trees you saw yesterday, which you thought were a forest."

"But if, from this height, the oxen appear no larger than sheep, the sheep ought not to look greater than flies."

"You can easily judge; there is a flock of goats down below."

"A flock of goats! It is like a swarm of ants."

"Exactly; but look at them through the telescope."

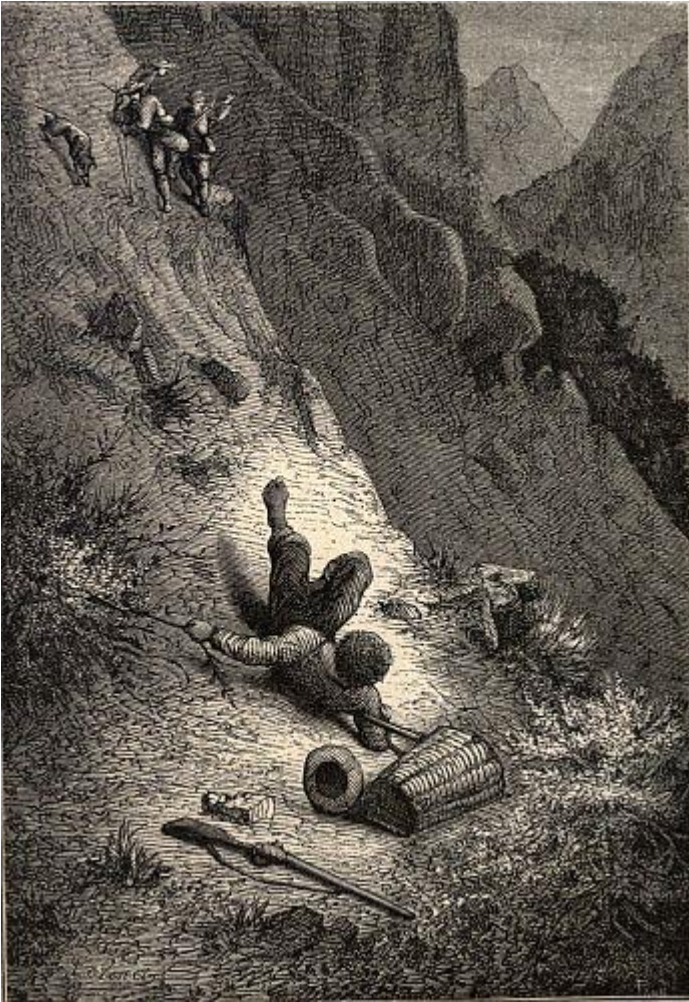
Availing himself of the glass, which he used rather unskillfully, Lucien raised a sudden cry.

"I see them! I see them!" he exclaimed. "How pretty they are! They are running about and crowding together, in front of a little boy who is driving them."

"It is most likely a man, who is diminished by the distance."

"The idea of men of that size!"

"Well, look at the foot of that wooded hill; the thin line which you might easily take for a mere pathway is the main road. Perhaps you may see an Indian family travelling along it."[49]



"The basket and its bearer

chased one another down the hill."

[51] Lucien kept shifting his telescope about for some minutes without descrying any thing; but at last he broke out in a fresh exclamation.

"Have you discovered any men?" I asked.

"Oh yes!—men, horses, and mules; but they are regular Lilliputians."

"You are quite right," said Sumichrast; "how do we know that Dr. Swift did not first form his idea of 'Gulliver's Travels' from looking at the world from the top of a high mountain?"

After a time, I was obliged to take the young observer away from this point for contemplation to proceed on our journey. The ridge of the mountain was soon crossed, and we began to descend the other side. I took Lucien by the hand, for the slope was so steep that it needed the utmost care to avoid rolling down over the naked rocks. Several times I slipped, and scratched my legs among the bushes.

Sumichrast, who had taken his turn in looking after the boy, was no better off than myself. The descent was so steep that we were often forced to run, and sometimes the only thing possible to retard our impetus was to fall down, and run the risk of being hurt. Therefore, in spite of Lucien's promise to walk prudently and with measured step, I declined to allow him to go alone. We at last, to our great satisfaction, got over about two-thirds without any accident, when l'Encuerado, losing his equilibrium, fell, turning head over heels several times; the basket and its bearer chasing one another down the hill, finally disappearing into a thicket.

"Look after Lucien," I said to my companion, who was a few paces in front. And I dashed forward anxiously to assist l'Encuerado.

I feared that I should find the unfortunate Indian with some of his bones broken, even if not killed; so I called to[52] him, when he replied almost immediately; but his voice sounded not from below, but from a spot a little to my left. I could not stay my rapid course except by grasping a tuft of brush-wood, to which I hung. Then, turning towards the left, I soon encountered the Mistec, who had already begun to collect his burden.

"Nothing broken?" I asked.

"No, Tatita; all the bottles are safe."

"It's your limbs that I mean, my poor fellow!"

"Oh! my nose and arms are a little scratched, and my body is rather knocked about; but there's not a single rent either in my jacket or breeches," added he, looking with complacency at the leathern garments which had given him the name of l'Encuerado.

"Well, you have had a narrow escape."

"Oh! señor, God is good! In spite of the basket-work case, the bottles might have been broken, and they are not the least hurt."

For my part, I was more inclined to recognize God's goodness in l'Encuerado's almost miraculous preservation. As to the basket, the Indian had tied it up so strongly, that I was not at all surprised to find that our provisions were uninjured.

"Give a call-cry," said I to the Indian, "Sumichrast can not see us, and may think that you are killed."

"Chanito, hiou, hiou, hiou, Chanito!"

"[Ohé! ohé!](#)" replied Lucien.

And the boy, looking pale and alarmed, almost immediately made his appearance. He rushed up to his friend, threw his arms round his neck, and embraced him. The brave Mistec, who had been but little injured by his terrible descent, could not help weeping at this proof of Lucien's attachment.

"It was nothing but a joke," he said. "You'll see me perform many a feat like that." [53]

"Your face is all over with blood!"

"That's a mere joke, too. Would you like me to do it again?"

"No, no!" cried the child, catching the Indian by the jacket.

I dressed l'Encuerado's hurts, and we were about to continue our journey.

"I say," said Lucien, archly, just as the Indian was hoisting his basket on to his back; "how would it have been if I had been perched on it?"

"Then I should not have fallen," replied l'Encuerado, with the utmost gravity.

In a minute or two more we were at the foot of the mountain, when Lucien, overjoyed that the descent was accomplished, gave a leap which showed me that the back of his trowsers had suffered in the late struggle.

"There's a pretty beginning!" I cried; "how did you manage to get your trowsers in that state?"

"It is my fault," said Sumichrast, with consternation; "wishing to descend more rapidly, and fearing another tumble, I advised him to sit down and slide carefully. I did not foresee the very natural results of such a plan."

"Well, papa! it does not matter in the country."

"If my advice had been taken," broke in l'Encuerado, "he would have had a pair of leathern pantaloons, which wouldn't suffer from such contingencies. Never mind, Chanito, we'll mend them with the skin of the first squirrel which comes within reach of my gun."

We were now passing through a dark gorge full of thick brush-wood. In front of us rose a wooded mountain, which we had to climb. The shrubs were succeeded by gigantic thistles, which compelled us to advance with extreme care. These troublesome plants grew so thickly that we were obliged to use our knives to clear a passage.

L'Encuerado, [54] putting down his load, taught Lucien how to handle his; showing him that a downward cut, if the weapon slipped or met with but little resistance, might be dangerous. Enchanted with his lesson, and cutting down several stalks at a blow, our

young pioneer soon opened for us an avenue rather than a path. The thistles gradually became fewer. Sumichrast walked in front, destroying the last obstacles that severed us from the under-wood.

It was now breakfast-time, and as we continued our course we looked out for a favorable spot to halt at, when the measured strokes of an axe fell upon our ears. This noise told of the presence of wood-cutters, who were certain to be provided with maize-cakes and beans; so we resolved to make our way up to them, and thus economize our own resources. After an hour's difficult ascent, just as we were despairing of reaching the Indian, whose axe had ceased to sound, Lucien cried out:

"Look, papa, there's a fire!"

At the same moment Gringalet began barking furiously, and a few paces more brought us to a burning charcoal-oven. The charcoal-burner, who was surprised at our visit, seized his long-handled axe. But the presence of the child appeared to reassure him.

"Good-morning, Don José," said I, using the common name which is applied in Mexico to all the Indians.

"God preserve you," replied he, speaking in broken Spanish.

"Are you all alone?"

"No. I have six companions."

"Well, will one of you sell us some maize-cakes, and give us some water?"

"We have neither water nor cakes."

"I'm quite sure you will be able to find some," I replied, placing a half-piastre in his hand.[55]



was pushed aside."

"Almost immediately the foliage

[57]

The Indian took off his straw hat, scratched his forehead, and then, placing two fingers in his mouth, whistled a prolonged note. Almost immediately the foliage was pushed aside, and a boy about fifteen years old, wearing nothing but a pair of drawers, made his appearance, and halted, as if terrified at the sight of us.

"Run to the hut, and ask for cakes and some capsicums, and bring them here," said the wood-cutter, in the Aztec language.

"It's quite needless," I replied, in the same idiom; "we can breakfast much more comfortably in the hut."

The wood-cutter looked at me in artless admiration, then taking my hand, placed it on his breast. I spoke his language, and I was therefore his friend. This is a feeling common to all men, whatever may be their nationality or social position.

Following the young Indian, in five minutes we reached a very primitive dwelling; being but four stakes supporting a roof made of branches with their leaves on. The wood-men in Mexico construct such temporary places of shelter, for at the commencement of the rainy season they cease to dwell in the forests.

An Indian girl warmed us a dozen of those maize-flour fritters, which are called *tortillas*, and are eaten by the natives instead of bread. She also brought us a calabash full of cooked beans, which hunger rendered delicious.

"Why don't they serve the meat first?" asked Lucien.

"Because they have none," replied Sumichrast.

"Haven't these Indians any meat? Poor fellows! How will they dine, then?"

"Don't you know that the Indians never eat meat more than three or four times a year; and that their usual food is composed of nothing but black beans, rice, capsicums, and maize flour? Have you forgotten our dinner yesterday?"[58]

"I fancied that we had arrived too late for the first course, and that all the meat had been used. But shall we live on beans the whole of our journey?"

"No; our meals will not be quite so regular as you seem to think. Yet we shall have plenty of meat when we have been lucky in shooting, a little rice when we have been unfortunate, and fried beans whenever chance throws in our way any inhabited hut."

"And we shall have to go without dessert?" said the child, making up his face into a comical pout.

"Oh no, Chanito, there will be dessert to-day," replied l'Encuerado. "Perhaps as good as the cook would provide at home; but, at any rate, it is sweet enough. Look at it!"

The Indian girl brought a calabash full of water, and a cone of black sugar, weighing about half a pound.

"What is that?" cried Lucien.

"*Panela*," answered the Indian girl.

"Poor man's sugar," interposed Sumichrast. "The manufacture of white sugar, which you saw yesterday, costs a good deal, for the laborers employed to make it have to work night and day, and thus it becomes expensive. Now, some sugar-makers avoid all this outlay, and they merely boil the juice, so that it will harden in cooling. This dark-colored sugar costs about one-half as much in making as the other."

"I can well believe it," said the child; "but it contains all that nasty scum which we saw."

"That makes it the nicer," said l'Encuerado; "it has a richer flavor."

And taking a morsel of the *panela*, he soaked it in the water in the calabash and sucked it.

When Lucien saw that we, too, imitated the Indian, he soon made up his mind to do likewise, the sweet taste overcoming his repugnance.[59]

When we had finished, our young companion was anxious to know how charcoal was made. Sumichrast led him close to a recently-felled oak, the small branches of which an Indian was cutting into pieces two or three inches long, by means of an instrument something like an enormous pruning-knife. A little farther, on the open ground, two men were collecting these pieces of wood in circular rows. This pile was already seven feet in circumference, and about the same in height, although it was not half finished. Lucien could easily see this when he approached the Indian who was looking after the lighted furnace, in which the wood, completely covered with earth, formed a kind of dome, from the summit of which a blue flame was hovering, proving that the mass inside was in a red-hot state. The Indian kept walking round and round the furnace, plastering damp earth on any holes through which the flame started. For, as Sumichrast properly observed, a charcoal of good quality must be smothered while it is being burned.

"Suppose the fire went out?" said Lucien.

"Then all the work must be begun over again."

"But the fire might burn only one side."

"They would then have badly-burned charcoal, nearly half wood, which would cause a bad smell when it was used. The wood in the oven we are looking at will be entirely charred to-night; for the fire, which was lighted at the centre, is trying to break through all round the outside. Before long the Indians will cover up the opening at the top, over which the blue flame is hovering. The fire will then be quite deprived of air, and soon afterwards go out. In about eight days your mamma may perhaps buy this very charcoal which you have seen burned."

"Suppose the charcoal went on burning?"

"Then the Indian, to his great vexation, would find nothing[60] left but ashes. But he will take good care not to lose the fruit of his labor. He will use as many precautions to prevent the fire burning up again as he does now to hinder it going out."

A little farther on a man was filling up his rush bags with charcoal which had cooled. As it would take him more than one day to reach the town, he was lining his sacks with a kind of balm, the penetrating odor of which always announces, in Mexico, the approach of a charcoal-carrier. This plan is adopted to preserve the charcoal from damp.

"When I used to see the Indians carrying on their backs their four little sacks of charcoal," said Lucien, "I had no idea that they were obliged to live in the woods, and cut down great trees to procure it; and that they had to pass several nights in watching the oven."

"No more idea, perhaps," I replied, "than the little boys in Europe have of the sugar-cane plantations; and that without the plant all those beautiful *bon-bons*, which delight the sight as much as the taste, could not be made."

"But, papa, haven't I heard you tell the Mexicans that in France they make sugar with beet-root?"

"Yes, certainly you have; and, in case of need, it might be extracted from many other roots, plants, or fruit; but beet-root alone yields enough sugar to repay the trouble of extraction."

It was quite time for us to be off; so I put an end to the ceaseless questions of the young traveller.

Our host told me that if we went on along the same path which had led us to their place, we should come, in less than two hours, to a hut situated on the plateau of the mountain. The Indians certainly seemed to forget that Lucien's short legs might delay our progress.

[61]



CHAPTER IV.

A DIFFICULT ASCENT.—THE GOAT.—THE INDIAN GIRLS.—THE TOBACCO-PLANT.—
THE BULL-FIGHT.—GAME.—LUCIEN'S GUN.—OUR ENTRY INTO THE WILDERNESS.

Our way led through nothing but scrub oaks, for all the larger trees had gradually disappeared from the mountain-side, which had for some time been cultivated by the Indians. The path was steep, rugged, and stony; and seemed, at first, to defy any attempt to scale it. Notwithstanding the measured pace at which we were walking, we were obliged to stop every minute to recover our breath. Lucien followed us so eagerly that I was obliged to check him several times. He was surprised at not seeing any living creature, not even those beautiful golden flies which, in [62] Mexico, flutter round every bush. But the north wind was blowing, and the sun was hidden behind the clouds, so that both the insects and birds kept in the deepest recesses of their hiding-places. As we advanced, our road became much steeper, and we were obliged to cling to the shrubs for support. L'Encuerado, who was impeded by the weight of his load, pulled himself up with his hands, so had hard work to keep his balance. Soon it became impossible for him to go farther; but, fortunately, we had foreseen ascents of this kind. So I gave the child into Sumichrast's charge, for if he had been left to climb by himself, he would most likely have rolled over and hurt himself against the stumps or sharp rocks.

I made my way into a copse, and with my *machete* I cut down a moderately-sized branch, the end of which I sharpened to a point. Then, going forward and unrolling a

leathern thong, thirty feet in length, and commonly called by us a *lasso*, I fastened it to the stake, which I drove firmly into the ground. By means of this support, which served as a sort of hand-rail, L'Encuerado could clamber up to me, thanks to the strength of his wrists. Ten times this awkward job had to be repeated, and the path, instead of getting better, became worse. We then shifted our work, and I took charge of the load, while the tired Indian fixed the *lasso*. I was just making my third ascent, when Sumichrast, who had gone on before us to reconnoitre the ground, made his appearance above. When he saw me stumbling and twisting about, falling now on my side, and now on my knees, toiling to advance a single step, my companion burst into a fit of laughter. I had then neither time nor will to do as he did, and his ill-timed mirth vexed me. At last I caught hold of the stake, bruised and exhausted, and ready to wish there was no such thing as travelling. Sumichrast told us that we had scarcely three hundred feet more to ascend,[63] and shouldered the basket himself. Now that I was a mere spectator, I could readily forgive him his fit of merriment. Nothing, in fact, could be more grotesque than the contortions he went through trying to keep his balance. L'Encuerado was the only one who retained his countenance. As for Lucien, he seemed to feel the efforts of Sumichrast as much as if they were his own.

"You see," I said to my son, "that in countries where there are no beaten roads a walk is not always an easy matter."

At last, we got out of this difficult locality. While all this was going on, Gringalet, gravely squatting down upon his haunches, seemed perfectly amazed at our efforts. Pricking up his ears and winking his eyes, he quietly surveyed us; no doubt secretly congratulating himself upon being able to run and gambol easily in places where we, less-suitably-constructed bipeds, found it difficult even to walk.

Here there were no trees to be seen. As on the evening before, we traversed a granite surface soil which formed the ridge of the mountain; but a sudden turn in the path led us to a plateau, on which stood a rudely-built hut.

Three children ran away as we came near, and two lean dogs began to prowl round Gringalet with any thing but friendly intentions. A goat, which was quietly cropping the scanty grass, suddenly raised its head, and, cutting several capers, ran with its head bent down, as if to butt our little companion. I could not reach the spot in time to prevent this unforeseen attack, nevertheless I shouted, in hopes of intimidating the animal; but Gringalet, who was far more nimble than I, boldly faced the enemy, and soon forced him to retreat.

"Weren't you afraid of him?" asked Sumichrast.

"Rather," answered Lucien, hanging down his head.[64]

"Well, it did not prevent you facing the foe."

"If I had run away, the goat, who runs a great deal faster than I can, would soon have overtaken me. I waited for him, so as to frighten him with my stick, and, if possible, avoid his horns."

"You could not have acted more sensibly. At all events you've plenty of coolness, and that is about the best quality a traveller can show."

"All right now, but in future I shall keep clear of goats. But I thought they were afraid of men."

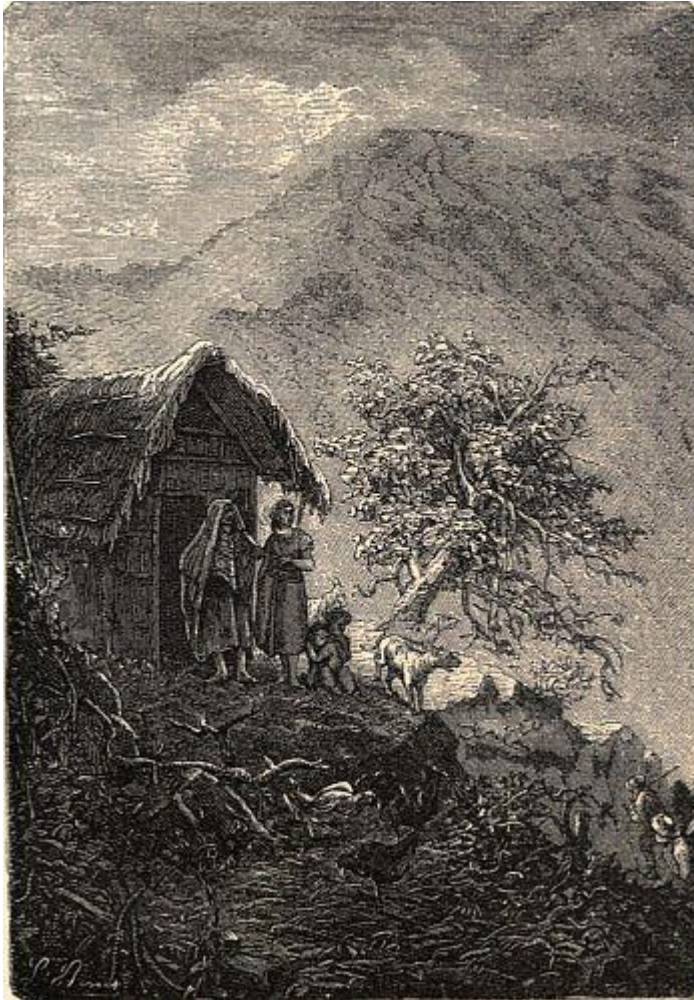
"Not always, as you were very near finding out to your cost. Perhaps, however," continued Sumichrast, smiling, "your enemy did not look upon you quite as a man; and, after all, I fancy he thought more of playing with you than of hurting you, for he must be thoroughly accustomed to the sight of children."

At this moment Gringalet came running up with his tail between his legs, and with a most doleful look; he was closely pursued by all the dogs of the plateau, who, instead of barking, were making a kind of howling noise, common to those that are but half domesticated.

On hearing all this uproar, two Indian women came running towards us, but stopped, abashed at our appearance.

The youngest of them, rather a pretty girl, wore nothing but a short linen chemise, and a piece of blue woollen stuff fastened round her hips by a wide band, ornamented with red threads. Her hair, which was plaited and brought over her forehead, formed a sort of coronet. Her companion, who was dressed in a similar way, wore, in addition, a long scarf, which was fixed to her head, and fell round her like a nun's cloak.

"God bless you, Maria!" I said to the eldest. "Can you take us in for one night?"[65]



"On hearing the uproar, two

Indian women came running towards us."

[67]

"I have nothing to offer you to eat, I am afraid."

"Perhaps you can sell us a fowl and some eggs."

"Well, I must see if my husband objects to guests."

"Surely your husband will not refuse the shelter of his roof to weary travellers?"

She reflected for a moment, and then answered,

"No, he is a Christian! Come in and rest yourselves."

The Indian woman called to her children, who one after the other showed their wild-looking heads peeping out from some hiding-place, and ordered them to drive away the dogs.

It was not without some degree of pleasure we got rid of our travelling gear, as we felt no ordinary amount of weariness, which was easily accounted for by the exertion of our recent ascent. L'Encuerado, always brisk, began to assist the housewife; he stirred up the fire, arranged the plates, and looked to their being clean. The Indian woman then asked him to go and draw some water from a spring about a hundred yards from the hut; and off he went, led by the children of our hostess. His young guides, completely naked, and their heads shaved, rode on bamboo-canes as make-believe horses, and pranced along in front of him.

Except on the side we had just ascended, the plateau was entirely surrounded by high mountains. The hut, which was built of planks and covered with thatch, appeared very cleanly kept. Behind it extended a small kitchen garden, in which fennel, the indispensable condiment in Aztec cookery, grew in great abundance; in front, there was a large tobacco plantation, and an inclosure where both goats and pigs lived on good terms with each other. The situation appeared somewhat dull to us; but in the tropics the absence of sunshine is sufficient to give a sombre look to the most beautiful landscape.

Lucien wanted to pay a visit to the tobacco-field. The stems of this plant are more than three feet high, covered[68] with wide leaves of a dark-green color. The flowers, some of which were pink and others a yellowish hue, indicated two different species; their acrid smell was any thing but pleasant. Lucien was not a little surprised to learn that this beautiful *vegetable* belonged to the same botanical family as the potato, the tomato, the egg-plant, and the pimento.

"Among the ancient Aztecs," said Sumichrast, "tobacco was called *pyciatl*; it was the emblem of the goddess Cihua-cohuatl, or woman-serpent.^[E] In Mexican mythology, this divinity was supposed to be the first mother of children; and, in the legend about her, the European missionaries fancied that they recognized some features resembling the sacred history of Eve. Up to the present time, the Indians, who have renounced the errors of paganism and profess the Christian religion, continue to make use of the plant consecrated to their ancient goddess, as a remedy for the sting of venomous reptiles."

"Then that is why they cultivate tobacco," said Lucien, "for I know that they seldom smoke."

"No, but they sell their crops of it to the Creoles, among whom smoking is a universal habit. It is said that the word *tobacco* comes from the name of the island of Tabago, where the Spaniards first discovered it. About the year 1560, it was introduced into France by Jean Nicot, who gave it his own name; for *savants* call this plant *nicotian*. It

is a certain fact that the modern Mexican Indians smoke hardly any thing but cigars or cigarettes. As for pipes, they have not long known of the existence of such things; and the works of certain romancers, who so often describe the Aztecs as having the pipe of peace, war, or council constantly in their mouths, are simply ridiculous. You may recollect[69] how astonished the French were, on their arrival here, to find they could not procure any cut tobacco; while on the other hand the Indians crowded to see the foreigners inhale the smoke of the plant from instruments made of clay, wood, or porcelain."[\[F\]](#)

"I remember," cried Lucien, "that one day l'Encuerado took a pipe belonging to an officer who was staying with papa and began to smoke it. You should have seen what horrible faces he made."

"Well, what happened to him?" asked Sumichrast.

"The pipe made him sick, and then papa, who knew nothing about his smoking, gave him some medicine; but l'Encuerado told me that the medicine was not nearly so nasty as the pipe."

The culprit, who had just joined us, cast down his eyes at this tale about him, and murmured in a sententious tone of voice, "Pipes are an invention of the devil."[\[G\]](#)

Followed by my companions, I again drew near to the hut, and the master came out to bid us welcome. Our hostess placed upon a mat an earthen dish containing a fowl cooked with rice, and the Indian, his wife, and his sister-in-law, offered to wait on us. Lucien invited the children to partake of our repast; but they refused to sit down beside us. Towards the conclusion of our dinner, one of them brought us half a dozen bananas, which were most welcome; while we were drinking our coffee, the little troop made up a game of hide-and-seek. To my great satisfaction, I saw that, in spite of the long day's journey, Lucien joined in, and[70] ran and jumped about with as much energy as his play-mates.

At last the children got tired of this game, and, bringing a kid, had a mock bull-fight. The animal, wonderfully well trained to the sport, ran after the youngsters, and more than once succeeded in knocking them down. When Lucien met this fate, Gringalet became furious and sprang upon the pretty little creature; but the dog's young master got up in a moment and soon quieted his protector's energy. We had noticed, ever since we set out, that Gringalet always preferred to follow close to the boy, and seemed to have taken upon himself the task of watching over his safety.

Our host told us that he was born and also married in the village of Tenejapa; but being enlisted for a soldier by force, he deserted and took up his abode on this plateau. We

were the first white men who had paid him a visit for six years. His fields produced maize, beans, and tobacco, which his wife and sister-in-law took twice a year to Orizava to exchange for necessities for housekeeping. He was as happy as possible, and was never tired of praising the charms of forest and plain. But his raptures were not required to convert us to his opinions.

Nightfall was accompanied by cold, to which we were but little accustomed. The Indians lent us some mats; then we all wrapped ourselves up, and were soon asleep, notwithstanding the primitiveness of our couch.

About two in the morning I woke up numbed from the lowness of the temperature; Lucien also was nearly frozen. I hastened to cover him up with my *sarapé*, for on these heights we were exposed to the north wind blowing from the volcano of Citlatepetl, and the atmosphere would not get warm again until sunrise. Sumichrast soon joined me; he had also given up his covering to the child. I then set to work to look for some small branches to light the fire;^[71] but our movements ultimately roused up our host, and, thanks to him, we were soon able to sit down in front of a powerful blaze. Still l'Encuerado, from force of habit, who was hardly sheltered at all, was sleeping like a top. At last, aided by the heat, sleep resumed its influence, and I dropped off again in slumber.

When I awoke, the sun was shining in a cloudless sky, and every body was up. Sumichrast was inspecting the arms and ammunition, for from this day forward we should have to provide our own subsistence. I was quite surprised at the time I had been asleep; but a slight touch of lumbago reminded me of yesterday's difficult ascent, which fully accounted for my drowsiness. I must confess I felt much more inclined to go to bed again than to continue our journey; but, as I was obliged to set a good example, I began to help my companions in their preparations for departure. I have already described the dress of Lucien and l'Encuerado; Sumichrast's costume and mine also consisted of strong cloth trowsers, and a blouse made of the same stuff. The weapons of each were a revolver, a *machete*, a double-barrelled gun, and a game-bag filled with necessities. We duly examined the contents of the basket, which l'Encuerado carried on his back by a strap fixed across his breast or forehead. Sumichrast then took out a long parcel he had put into the basket when we started, and unrolled the cloth which formed its first covering. His smile and mysterious look quite puzzled us; at last he drew from the paper a light fowling-piece, which he placed in Lucien's hands.

The boy blushed and trembled with joy, and became quite pale with anxiety. He hardly dared to believe that his fondest dream was thus realized. He could not speak for

pleasure, but threw himself into my friend's arms. I was as much surprised as he was. I had often thought of[72] giving Lucien a gun; but I was so afraid of an accident that I had decided not to do so.

"Oh, Chanito! I pity the poor tigers; what a number of them you will kill!" exclaimed the old hunter. "What beautiful skins you will be able to take home to mamma! Come, let me handle your gun; it looks as if it was made on purpose for you. Oh! how I pity the poor tigers!"

And he began to dance about with the energy of delight.



It was decided that the gun should always be loaded by us, and that Lucien should only shoot under our directions. I also added that, at the least infringement of these rules, the gun would be taken away, and the little fellow well knew I would keep my word. In vain I advised him to put back his gun into the basket; but this was almost too much to expect, so I allowed him to carry it, which he did with great pride.[73] Lucien said good-bye to his little companions, and I thanked



**"Behind us opened a dark,
narrow ravine, with perpendicular sides."**

After a good breakfast, we regulated our compasses.[75] the Indian women for all their attention to us. Our host, however, accompanied us to the summit of the mountain.

There we found ourselves in a vast amphitheatre, commanded on all sides by wooded ridges; at our feet stretched the plateau we had just crossed, and far beneath us we caught indistinct glimpses of the plain below. Behind us opened a dark, narrow ravine, with perpendicular sides, almost like an immense wall. Above us was the pale blue sky, dotted over with vultures.

On the verge of the forest our guide parted from us with regret, and wished us a successful journey. Sumichrast loaded Lucien's gun, and told him to fire it off as a salute on our entering the wilderness. The shot was fired, the echoes reverberating in succession, each louder than the last; then all was once more silent. After casting a last look over the valley, I was the first to make my way into the forest. From this

moment we had only God's providence and our own exertions to trust to; for every step we advanced only took us farther from the haunts of men.



[76]



CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT FOREST.—CROWS.—THE FIRST BIVOUAC.—THE SQUIRREL-HUNT.—OUR YOUNG GUIDE.—THE CHANT IN THE DESERT.

We were now more than 5000 feet above the level of the sea, and the coldness of the breeze quite surprised my son, who, being accustomed to the climate of the *Terre-Tempérée*, had never before felt any thing like the atmosphere we were now in. As if by instinct, he held his fingers in his mouth, to prevent their getting numbed. But when the sun had reached a certain height, there was no longer any need to complain of the cold.

As we advanced, the trees grew closer and closer together. Lucien, who now for the first time saw these enormous trees, to whom centuries were no more than years are to us,[77] seemed strongly impressed at the sight of their gigantic proportions. He almost doubted the reality of the scene which met his eyes. Having previously seen the pigmy world of Lilliput from the top of a mountain, he was now ready to inquire if this was not another illusion, exhibiting to him the empire of one of those giants whose marvellous histories his mamma had related to him. An oak-tree which had fallen across our path gave him a good opportunity of measuring its size, the limbs of which seemed to touch the sky. The ancient trunk was black, wrinkled, and partly buried in the earth by the weight of its fall; even as it lay prostrate, it was several feet higher than ourselves, while the large branches, scattered and broken, were equal in diameter to the biggest chestnut-trees. A flapping of wings suddenly attracted our attention, and we saw two couples of enormous crows take flight, saluting us as they went with a prolonged croaking.

"Be off with you, children of the evil one!" cried l'Encuerado; "you've no chance of frightening us, we are too good Christians for that!"

"Whom are you calling to?" asked Lucien, who looked round him with surprise.

"To the crows, of course."

"Do you believe that they can understand you?"

"Not the least doubt about it, Chanito. These scoundrels are harder in their flesh than they are in their hearing; and just because they are dressed up in a beautiful black coat, like that your papa wears on festival days, they think to have every thing their own way. But if one of them dares to come to-night and prowl round our fire, I'll kill and roast him, as sure as my name is l'Encuerado!"

The boy opened his eyes very wide at this, for he was always astonished at the whims of the Indian, who never failed to interpret the cries and gestures of animals according[78] to his own fancy, and to give a sharp rejoinder to the imaginary provocations which, as he considered, were offered to him. Sometimes, even, he laid the blame on inanimate things, and then his conversations with them were most amusing. The old hunter had no doubt contracted this habit at a time when, living alone in the woods and feeling the need of talking, he conversed with himself, having no one else to address. However this might be, he kept up conversation with either a leaf or a bird in perfectly artless sincerity.

For four hours we proceeded through the forest, feeling almost overcome with the heat. Pines and oaks appeared, one after another, in almost monotonous regularity.

Gradually the ground began to slope, and the altered pace we had to adopt both rested us and also increased the speed of our march. At length we emerged into a valley. The vegetation was now of an altered character, the ceibas, lignum-vitæ trees, and creepers were here and there to be seen.

"Halt!" I cried out.

I soon got rid of my travelling gear, an example my companions were not slow in following. L'Encuerado and Lucien immediately set to work to find some dry branches, while Sumichrast and I began to cut down the grass over a space of several square yards.

"Have we finished our day's journey, then?" asked Lucien.

"Yes," I replied; "don't you feel tired?"

"Not very; I could easily go farther. Have we walked very far?"

"About four leagues."

"And are we really going to rest after a trifle like that? I always thought travellers went on walking until night."

"Nonsense!" said I, taking hold of his ear. "What an[79] undaunted young pedestrian! Four leagues a day are no such trifle when you have to begin again next morning. 'Slow and steady wins the race,' says an old proverb, which I intend to carry out to the letter; for forced marches would soon injure our health, and then good-bye to the success of our expedition. As to walking until night, it is perfectly impossible, except when one is certain to meet with an inn. Under these large trees, no one will ever think of getting ready a meal for us; and, I suppose, you haven't much wish to die of hunger. We may very likely have to tramp one or two leagues more before we are able to kill the game which will form the mainstay of our dinner."

"I never thought of all that," said Lucien, shaking his head, and looking convinced; "but what shall we have to eat this evening?"

"At present, I haven't the least idea; perhaps a hare or a bird, or even a rat."

"A rat! I certainly will never touch one."

"Ah! my boy, wait till you are really hungry—you don't know as yet what it is to be so—and then you'll see how greedily you will make a dinner off whatever Providence provides."

"Do you think we shall often have to go a whole day without eating?"

"I hope not," I answered, smiling at Lucien's anxious and somewhat pensive tone.

During this conversation, l'Encuerado, as active as a monkey, had clambered up a pine, and his *machete* was strewing the ground with slender boughs. We also set to work at shaping the stakes, which I drove into the ground by means of a stone, which served as a hammer. Some branches, interwoven and tied together by creepers, formed a kind of hurdle, which, fixed on the top of the[80] posts, did for a roof. The Indian, assisted by his little companion, who was much interested in all the preparations, filled the hut with leaves, and covered the branches with a layer of dry grass. Under this shelter, we could set the rain at defiance, if not the cold.

It is impossible to describe Lucien's enchantment. This *house* (for this was the name he chose to give to the shapeless hut, in which our party could scarcely stand upright) appeared to him a perfect masterpiece of architecture, and he was astonished at the rapidity with which it had been built. He helped l'Encuerado to make up the fire, so that all that was requisite on our return was to set a light to it. Then, armed with our guns, we set off to seek for our dinners.

Seeing that we left behind us all our baggage, Lucien exclaimed,

"Suppose any one came and stole our provisions?"

"Upon my word," cried Sumichrast, "you're the boy to think of every thing. But there's no need to fear this misfortune; most likely, we are the only persons in the forest; or if any one else should be here, it would be an almost miraculous chance if they discovered our bivouac."

"Then we are not on any road?"

"You may call it a road if you like, but we are the only people who have trod it; no one could discover our encampment unless they had followed us step by step."

The child shook his head with a rather doubtful air; the idea of the desert is not readily nor suddenly comprehended. I well recollect that, during my first excursions in the wilderness, I was constantly expecting to catch sight of some human face, either just when I was emerging from a wood or in following the paths made in the savannah by wild cattle. At night, especially when I was troubled by sleeplessness, I was always fancying that I recognized, in the[81] distant sounds, either the crow of a cock, the barking of a dog, or the burden of some familiar song.

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[83]

glades."

"We now entered one of those

"But if no one can discover our bivouac," remarked Lucien, casting a glance behind him, "how shall we manage to find it again?"

"In a way that is simple, but rather laborious; we shall walk one after the other, and the last man's duty will be to notch the trees and shrubs."

"Shall I walk first?" asked Lucien.

"No; that place belongs by right to the best shot; for if we put up any game, we mustn't let it escape. In the mean time, until you know how to use your gun, you shall form the rear-guard."

This duty did not seem to displease Lucien, who immediately seized his sword and followed us, at a little distance, inflicting on the trunks of the trees the gashes which were to guide us on our return. He performed his work with so much ardor that his

strength was soon exhausted. L'Encuerado afterwards taught him how to handle his weapon in a more skillful manner, and to notch the trees without stopping in his walk. A path marked in this manner is called, in Canada and the United States, a blaze road.

We now entered one of those glades which are so often met with in the midst of a virgin forest, although it is impossible to explain the cause why the trees do not grow just in these spots. As there was no living creature to be seen, I agreed with Sumichrast to leave Lucien and l'Encuerado on the watch, and that we should walk round, each on our own side, so as to meet again at the other extremity of the open space. Gringalet, seeing us separate, could not at first make up his mind which party he should go with; but bounded from one to the other, and caressed each of us, raising plaintive whines. At last he seemed determined to follow me, but scarcely had I progressed a hundred yards[84] before he stopped, as if to reflect. He probably thought he had left something behind, for he quickly disappeared.

I walked for half an hour through the brake, with eye and ear both on the watch, and my finger on the trigger, without discovering the least evidence of game. My companion did not appear more fortunate than I was, when suddenly a gun went off. At the same time, I saw Sumichrast pointing to a number of squirrels crossing the glade.

"Have you killed one?" I asked.

"Yes; but it is sticking fast between two branches, sixty feet above the ground; it is a shot thrown away."

We watched anxiously the rapid bounds of the graceful little animals which we had just disturbed, as they were fast making their way into the wood.

"Is l'Encuerado asleep?" I cried, with vexation.

My question was answered by two shot-reports in succession, and almost immediately Gringalet, l'Encuerado, and Lucien emerged from the forest. After searching about for a few minutes, the boy raised up his arm and showed us two squirrels he was holding. We now hastened our steps; the Indian had taken possession of the game, and was moving on towards our bivouac, while Lucien ran to meet us.

"Papa, papa!" he cried, all out of breath, "my gun killed one of the squirrels. Oh! M. Sumichrast, you shall see it; it is gray, with a tail like a plume."

"But was it really you that shot?" I asked.

"Oh yes! I shot, but L'Encuerado held my gun; we aimed into the middle of them, for there were a great many. If you could only have seen how they jumped! The one I hit climbed up on the tree close by; but it soon fell as dead as a stone. L'Encuerado says that it hadn't time to suffer much pain."

The poor child was making his *début* as a sportsman, and[85] his heart seemed rather full, although he was very proud of this first proof of his skill. Sumichrast was the first to congratulate him. As for me, although I was well aware of the Indian's prudence, I made up my mind, if only for the sake of economizing our powder, both to blame him and also to caution him against his desire of letting the boy shoot.

"Come," said I to Lucien, who was hugging his gun against his chest, "you must be our leader in finding our way back to our encampment. You marked out the road, so mind you don't mislead us."

Our young guide led us back to our starting-point with far more self-possession than I expected.

"A child's attention is always being drawn away," observed Sumichrast to me. "How do you explain Lucien's having followed the trail so readily?"

"Perhaps because it was partly his own work," I replied.

"It is, too, because I am so short," replied the child, with an arch smile; "I am much closer to the ground than you are, almost as close as Gringalet, who is so very clever in finding a trail. You see, papa, that it's some benefit in being little, and that I have some chance of being useful."

I need hardly say how much we were diverted at this novel argument against a lofty stature.

"At this rate," I replied, "I ought to have brought your brother Emile; for he is so short that he would have followed a trail even better than you."

"Of course you ought. Don't you recollect that when we were walking over the mountain of Borrego, he often spied out insects that you had missed seeing?"

I was evidently regularly beaten.

We sat down in front of the fire, before which the two squirrels were roasting. L'Encuerado caught in a dish the fat which trickled down from the animals, and every now and then basted the meat with it.[86]

The flesh of the squirrel, both in flavor and color, much resembles that of the hare; so our little mess-mate ate it with evident enjoyment. Dried maize-cakes, called *totopo*, took the place of bread, and each one had his allowance of it.

We couldn't help feeling uneasy about Gringalet: we had given him about half a squirrel, but instead of eating it, he thought fit to roll himself upon it frantically. The poor beast had consequently only some scraps of *totopo*. It was, however, highly necessary to accustom him to feed on game, as our maize-cakes were far too valuable to be doled out thus. Each of us poured a little water from his gourd into a calabash, which served for a drinking-vessel. The poor dog, thus allowanced, must have been sorry that he ever joined us.

The sun was perceptibly sinking.

"Well, Lucien," asked Sumichrast, "what do you think now of rat's flesh?"

"I'll tell you when I have eaten some of it."

"What! don't you know that the squirrel and the rat are very near relations, and that they both belong to the Rodent family?"

"They certainly are a little alike," said the child, making a comical face.

"Especially the species which we had for our dinner; which, by-the-by, is not yet classed by naturalists. Look! its coat is black on the back, gray on the flanks, and white under the belly. The ears, too, are bare, instead of having those long points of hair which give such a knowing look to the European squirrels."

"Do squirrels feed on flesh?"

"No; acorns, buds, nuts, grain, and sometimes grasses, constitute their principal food."

"Then," replied Lucien, triumphantly, "the flesh of the[87] squirrel can not resemble that of the rat, for I know that the rat will eat flesh."

The assured and self-satisfied tone of the little *savant* made us smile; but I almost immediately desired him to be silent, for a noise of branches rustling, which had excited our attention, became every moment more distinct. Gringalet was about to bark, but l'Encuerado caught him by the muzzle, and covered him with his *sarapé*. A whole troop of squirrels, no doubt those we had hunted two hours before, made their appearance, uttering sharp cries. They sprang from branch to branch with the most extraordinary disregard to distance. We noticed them running after one another, sometimes along the top, and sometimes along the bottom of the most flexible

boughs. They moved forward as if in jerks, sometimes stopping suddenly and climbing a tree, only to descend it again. When on the ground, they sat up on their hind legs, using their front paws like hands, and rubbed their noses with such a comical air that Lucien could not help speaking loud to express his admiration of them.

Hearing so strange a sound as the human voice, the graceful animals took flight, but not quick enough to prevent Sumichrast's gun from wounding one of them. The squirrel remained at first clinging to the tree on which it was when the shot struck it; but, after a pause, it relaxed its hold and rolled over and fell to the ground.

Nevertheless, it had strength enough left to turn round and bite the sportsman, who carelessly laid hold of him. L'Encuerado skinned it immediately, keeping the meat for our breakfast next morning.



The sun went down; the cries of the birds resounded, and night at last shut us in, bringing with it the solemn silence of the wilderness. L'Encuerado struck up a prolonged chant, and Lucien's fresh young voice blended with[88] that of the hunter. The tune was simple and monotonous in its character; but there was something touching in hearing the Indian and the child, both equally artless in mind, uniting together to sing the praises of God. The chant was ended by a prayer, which Sumichrast and I listened to, standing up, with our heads bared; and it was with earnestness that my friend repeated l'Encuerado's solemn "Amen," expressed in the words, "God is great."

Having fed the fire with sufficient [wood](#) to keep it up all night, we lay down, side by side, under the hut. The wind moaned softly through the foliage, and, under the influence of the gentle breeze, the pine-trees produced that melancholy sound which

so exactly calls to mind the noise of the surf breaking on the shore. By means of thinking of it, I felt it even in my sleep, for I dreamt that I was at sea, and that the vessel that bore me was sailing over silvery waters.

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CHAPTER VI.

COFFEE.—TURPENTINE.—COUROUCOUS.—PINE-NEEDLES.—THREE VOLCANOES IN SIGHT AT ONCE.—THE CARABUS FAMILY.—SCORPIONS.—SALAMANDERS.—A MIDNIGHT DISTURBANCE.

The first thing I saw on opening my eyes was l'Encuerado, who was getting ready our coffee, and Lucien crouching close to the fire, piling up a quantity of dry branches round the kettle, at some risk, however, of upsetting it.

"Why, Lucien," I cried, "it is not light yet, and you are up already! Didn't you sleep well?"

"Oh yes, papa," he answered, kissing me; "but l'Encuerado disturbed Gringalet, so he thought proper to come and lie down on *me*, and that woke me, for Gringalet is very[90] heavy. So, as I couldn't go to sleep again, I got up to look after the fire."

"And you are doing your work capitally. The kettle is singing loudly, and l'Encuerado will find it difficult to take it off without burning his fingers."

But the Indian had provided himself with two green branches, which he used to lift off the make-shift coffee-pot, into which he emptied both the sugar and the coffee.

"Where is the filter?" asked Lucien.

"Do you think you are still in the town?" I replied. "Why don't you ask for a cup and saucer as well?"

"But we can never drink this black muddy stuff!" cried Lucien.

"Never mind, Chanito," said the Indian; "I'll soon make it all right."

Then, taking his gourd, he poured from it some cold water into the mixture, and it immediately became cleared.

I told Lucien to go and wake up Sumichrast.

The child approached our companion, who was scarcely visible under the leaves, which served him both for coverlet and pillow.

"Hallo! hallo! M. Sumichrast; the soup is on the table."

"Soup!" repeated Sumichrast, rubbing his eyes. "Ah! you little monkey, you have disturbed me in such a pleasant dream. I fancied that I was no older than you, and that I was once more wandering over the mountains of my native land."

It is considered wholesome to take a cup of Mocha after a hearty meal; but, with all due deference to Grimod de la Reynière and Brillat Savarin, coffee seems still sweeter to the taste when taken at five o'clock in the morning, after passing the night in the open air.

The day broke; it was a magnificent sight to see the[91] forest gradually lighted up, and the trunks of the trees gilded by slanting sunbeams. Before starting again, one of our party carefully examined the ground on which we had camped, so as not to forget any of our effects, which, if lost, would have been irreparable. I also noticed that l'Encuerado's basket was decked with the three squirrels' skins, which would thus gradually dry.

We had walked on for nearly an hour, the only incident being our meeting with various kinds of birds, when the melancholy cry of the *couroucou* struck on our ears. The call of this bird is very much like that uttered by the Mexican ox-drivers when they herd together the animals under their care; hence its Spanish name of *vaquero*. We gave chase to them, and in less than half an hour we had obtained a male and female. Lucien was never tired of admiring these beautiful creatures, with their yellow beaks,

hooked like those of birds of prey. The male bird, in particular, was magnificent; the feathers on the head and back seemed to be "shot" with a golden green, while the edges of the wings and the belly were tinted with the purest crimson, shaded off into two black lines, which extended as far as the tail.

"Shall we find many of these birds in the forest, M. Sumichrast?" asked Lucien.

"No, Master 'Sunbeam;' they are rather rare; so we must take great care of the skins of these we have shot."

"Is their flesh good to eat?" he asked.

"Excellent; and many a gourmand would be glad to make a meal of it. However, at dinner-time, you shall try for yourself; and you will meet with very few people who, like you, have partaken of the *trogon massena*."

"At all events, it isn't another relation of the rat—is it?" asked the boy, archly.

"No; it belongs to the family of climbers—that is to[92] say, to that order of birds which have two toes in front of their claws and two behind, like your great friends the parrots."

After we had dressed the skins of the couroucous, and carefully wrapped up the game, we again moved on. The ground became stony, and the descent steeper. At one time I had hoped to find a spring at the bottom of the ravine; but we very soon discovered, to our great disappointment, that we should have to begin climbing again, leaving behind us the oaks and the *ceibas*, and meeting with nothing but gigantic pine-trees. The *pine-needles*,[\[H\]](#) which literally carpeted the ground, made it so slippery, that for every step forward we frequently took two backward. We fell time after time, but our falls were not in the least degree dangerous. Sometimes, as if at a signal, we all four rolled down together, and each laughed at his neighbor's misfortune, thus cheering one another. Lucien had an idea of hanging on to Gringalet's tail, who was the only one that could avoid these mishaps. This plan answered very well at first; but the dog soon after broke away by a sudden jerk, and the boy rolled backward like a ball, losing all the ground he had gained, but he at once got up again, quite in a pet with the dog, for whom he predicted a fall as a punishment for his treacherous behavior.

The troublesome pine-needles obliged us again to resort to the stake and lasso plan; l'Encuerado, with his load, strove in vain to keep up with us.

"Can any one understand the use of these horrible trees?" grumbled the Indian. "Why can't they keep their leaves to themselves? Why don't they grow in the plains, instead

of making honest folks wear the flesh off their bones in a place which is quite difficult enough to traverse as it is?"

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"God makes them grow here," said the child.

"Not at all, Chanito; God created them, but the devil has sown them on these mountains. I have travelled on the large plateau, where there are whole forests of pines, which proves that it was only for spite that they grow on this ascent."

Fortunately Lucien only half believed what the Indian said, and very soon asked me all about it.

"The pines," I replied, "are trees of the North, which never grow well except in cold climates and dry soils. If l'Encuerado had been acquainted with the history of his ancestors, he would have been able to give you some better information about them; he would have known that, in the Aztec mythology, they were sacred to the mother of the gods, the goddess Matlacueye, who, curiously enough, fills the part of Cybele among the Greek goddesses, whose favorite tree was also the pine."

Just at this moment we were passing close to a giant of the forest, which had been broken by a squall of wind; from three or four cracks in its trunk a transparent resin ran trickling out. Lucien, thinking these globules were solid, wished to take hold of one of them; but his fingers stuck to it.

"I fancied," said he, "that turpentine was obtained by crushing the branches of the pine-tree, just as they crush the stems of the sugar-cane."

"You were wrong, then," I answered. "The Indians, in the forests where they manufacture it, content themselves with cutting down the tree within a foot of the ground; the resin at once begins to ooze out, and gradually fills the leathern bottles placed to receive it. As soon as the resin ceases to flow, they cut the tree up into fagots for the use of the inhabitants of the towns, or the Indians living on plains, whose poor dwellings often possess no[94] other light than the smoky glimmer from a branch of fir."

I was obliged to cut short my explanations, in order to help Sumichrast and l'Encuerado, who, in spite of the lasso, seemed as if they were trying who could slip fastest. The only way we could get on at all was by describing zigzags, and thus we were two hours in climbing a quarter of a league. At last we arrived on the verge of the forest. The rocky ground seemed quite pleasant to walk upon: we could now advance in a straight line, and were able, with very little trouble, to reach another summit.

From the crest a marvellous panoramic view was in sight, for we overlooked all the surrounding country. On our left rose the gigantic and majestic peak of Orizava or Citlatepetl—that is, the "mountain of the star"—which rises to 17,372 feet above the sea-level. Lucien thought that this could not really be the same mountain the summit of which he was in the habit of seeing every morning.

"It is quite a different shape," he said.

"It is not the mountain, but the point from which you look at it, that has changed its appearance," replied Sumichrast.

"But it looks much higher," said Lucien.

"That is because we are nearer to it. From here we can discern the beautiful forest which surrounds its base as you ascend, the pines growing farther and farther apart, and gradually disappearing altogether. Higher still may be seen the glaciers glittering in the sun; and, last of all, the perpetual snow surrounding the crater, which was visited for the first time in 1847, by M. Doignon, a Frenchman."

"Popocatepetl, Istaccihuatl," said l'Encuerado gravely, pointing out the mountains.

The two mountains mentioned by the Indian were towering up behind us—a sight that alone repaid for our difficult[95] ascent; we could admire in turn the three loftiest volcanoes in Mexico.

"Where is Popocatepetl?" asked Lucien.

"There; that enormous cone which rises to our right," I answered, pointing in that direction.

"Is it the smallest of the three?"

"No; on the contrary, it does not measure less than 18,000 feet in height. Dias Ordas, one of the captains of Fernando Cortez, made its first ascent. Its name signifies 'smoking mountain.'"

"Yes; and I know that Istaccihuatl means 'white woman;' but I do not know the height of it."

"It is 15,700 feet above the level of the sea."

"How can mountains like these be measured?" asked Lucien.

"In the first place, by geometrical calculations, and then, by the aid of a barometer, when an ascent has been made. The column of mercury in the instrument falls in

proportion as the barometer is carried up the mountain, because the air which presses upon the mercury reservoir becomes less and less dense."

I quite forgot the lapse of time while contemplating the glorious panorama spread beneath. Just around us the ground was rocky and volcanic, and covered with mosses of various colors; rather lower down the ground was hidden by the fallen leaves of giant trees; beyond was a succession of smaller crests, frequently quite barren, sometimes covered with sun-scorched verdure. On the horizon, which was hidden by a transparent mist, the two volcanoes of the plateau stood out in bold relief against the blue sky, facing the other colossus, which seemed to protect us with its shadow. The peaks of these mountains, clad with their perpetual snow, can be seen by sailors forty leagues at sea.

I was really sorry to give the signal for departure. We[96] again met with the pine-needles, and though our ascent was difficult and slow, our descent was proportionably rapid. Thus we fell forward instead of falling backward. Gringalet, who seemed amused at our ridiculous postures, and was too confident in his own powers, shared our mishaps, much to the amusement of his young master, who had predicted that such would happen. L'Encuerado, utterly tired out, bethought himself of dragging his basket along the ground, which was so thickly covered with leaves that he managed it without damaging his load or breaking the bottles.

At last we came upon oak vegetation; and, still farther down, tropical plants. Various birds enlivened our journey by their song, while numbers of brilliant-colored insects hummed cheerfully round us. In less than an hour we had passed from autumn to spring, after having had a glimpse of winter. The creepers very soon obliged us to cut a passage with our *machetes*; but what was our joy upon perceiving, at the bottom of the ravine, a stream bordered with angelica and water-cress!

Thanks to the abundance of materials, our hut was quickly constructed. While l'Encuerado was getting dinner ready, I went to examine the half-rotten trunk of a tree which was lying on the ground. A multitude of insects, of an elegant shape and of a metallic-blue color, fled at my approach; they belonged to the numerous *Carabus* family, the flesh-eating *Coleopteræ*, which are found both in Europe and in America.

"Why don't they fly away, instead of running or tumbling over on the ground?" asked Lucien.

"Because they are but little used to flying, and are very quick at walking," I answered.

"Oh papa! the one I have caught has wetted my fingers, and it feels as if it had burned me."

"You are right; but you needn't be afraid; it will not[97] hurt you. Many of the *Carabus* family, when they are caught, try to defend themselves by throwing out a corrosive liquid; others make a report, accompanied by smoke, which has given them their name of *bombardier*."

"What do they find to eat under the bark, in which they must lead a very gloomy life?"

"Larvæ and caterpillars; they are, therefore, more useful than injurious."

"To what order of insects do they belong?"

"To the Coleoptera order, because they have four wings, the largest of which, called *elytra*, are more or less hard, and justify their name[1] by encasing the two other wings, which are membranous and folded crosswise. The cock-chafer, you know, is one of this order."

A fresh piece of bark revealed to us two scorpions with enormous bellies, and heads so small as to be almost imperceptible; all they did was to stiffen out their tails, which are composed of six divisions, the last terminating in an extremely slender barb.

"Oh, what horrid creatures!" cried Lucien, starting back; "if it wasn't for their light color, you might take them for prawns with their heads cut off."

"Yes, if you didn't examine them too closely. I suppose you will be very surprised when I tell you that they are allied to the spider tribe."

"I should never have suspected it. Are they dead, then, for they do not move?"

"Insects belonging to this order are very slow and lazy in their movements. They are found under most kinds of bark; therefore I advise you to take care when searching through it."

"Should I die if I were stung?"

[98]

"No; but it would cause a very painful swelling, which it would be best to avoid."

"I shall be afraid to meddle with the bark of trees, now."

"Then good-bye to your making a collection of insects. Prudence is a very good quality, but you must not make it an excuse for cowardice."

Upon examining the insects more closely, I saw that one of the scorpions, a female, was carrying three or four young ones on her back. This sight much amused Lucien, especially when he saw the animal begin to move slowly off with them.

"Do you know, Chanito," said l'Encuerado, who had now joined us, which showed that the cooking did not require his undivided attention, "that when the mother of the young scorpions does not supply them with food, they set to and devour her."

"Is that true?" asked Lucien, with surprise.

"If the little ones do not actually kill their mother, at all events they feed on her dead body," I answered. "You will have plenty of opportunities to verify this fact, for these insects are very plentiful in the *Terre-Tempérée*."

"Ah!" cried Lucien, "I was quite right, then, when I called them horrid creatures."

L'Encuerado, stripping off another piece of bark, exposed to view a salamander, which awkwardly tried to hide itself.

"You may catch it if you like; there is nothing to be afraid of," said I to Lucien, who had drawn back in fright.

"But it is a scorpion!" he exclaimed.

"You are too frightened to see clearly; it is a salamander, an amphibious reptile of the frog family. The scorpion has eight feet, while the salamander, which is much more like a lizard, has only four."

"Are they venomous?" asked Lucien of the Indian.

"No, Chanito; *Indians*" (it was well worth while hearing^[99] the contempt with which l'Encuerado pronounced this name) "are afraid of it; once I was afraid of it myself, but your papa has taught me to handle it without the least fear."

And the hunter placed the salamander in the boy's hand, who cried out—

"It is as cold as ice, and all sticky."

"It must be so, as a matter of course; the salamander, like a fish, is a cold-blooded animal. The viscous humor which is secreted by the skin of the salamander is able to protect them for a short time from injury by fire, by means of the same phenomenon by which a hand, previously wetted, can be plunged into melting iron without burning it.^[1] Thus an idea has arisen that these batrachians can exist in the midst of flames. Although these poor animals are deaf, nearly blind, and remarkable for their timidity,

poets, much to the amusement of naturalists, have chosen the salamander as an emblem of valor."

Assisted by Sumichrast, I continued the examination of the immense tree, which, being half rotted by the dampness of the soil, supplied us with some very beautiful specimens of various insects.

Suddenly we heard Lucien speaking in supplicating tones; I ran towards him, and found him trying to prevent l'Encuerado, who had got possession of the salamander, from making a trial of its powers of resisting fire.

"All right, Chanito; I will not leave it long on the coals; your papa said that these animals do not mind it a bit."

Lucien would not consent to this cruel experiment, but carried the animal back to the tree on which we had found it.



[100]The day was drawing to a close when we returned to the fire; from the stew-pan an appetizing odor was escaping, in which one of the couroucous, with a handful of rice, was boiling, while the other bird was roasting in front. It was really a capital dinner; first we had some excellent soup, of which Lucien had two platefuls; then came what was left of our squirrel, and last of all the roasted couroucou, which l'Encuerado served up on a bed of water-cresses. We had an unlimited supply of water; and, although my readers may smile at what I say, I really believe we drank too much. A cup of coffee crowned our feast, and then the remains were left to Gringalet, who licked every thing clean, even to the very saucepan. Lucien, having finished his meal, lay down by my side, and was not long before he was fast asleep.



"It was really a capital dinner."

A dismal howling from our four-footed companion woke us up with a start. We seized our arms. The dog, with his ears laid back, his tail between his legs, turned his nose to the wind with an anxious glance, and set up a fresh[101] howl, which was answered by the shrill prolonged cries of the coyotas, or jackal of Mexico.[102]
[103]

"So these miserable brutes think they are going to frighten us?" cried l'Encuerado.

And while we were making up the fire, the Indian rushed off into the darkness.

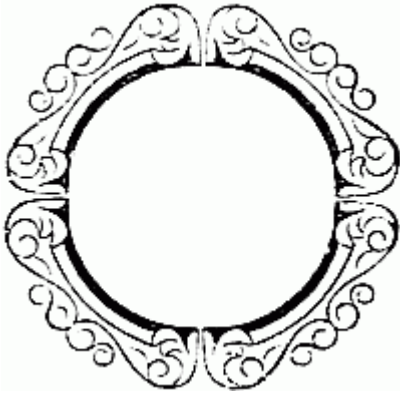
"Are they wolves, M. Sumichrast?" asked Lucien, anxiously.

"Yes, my boy, but only prairie wolves," he answered.

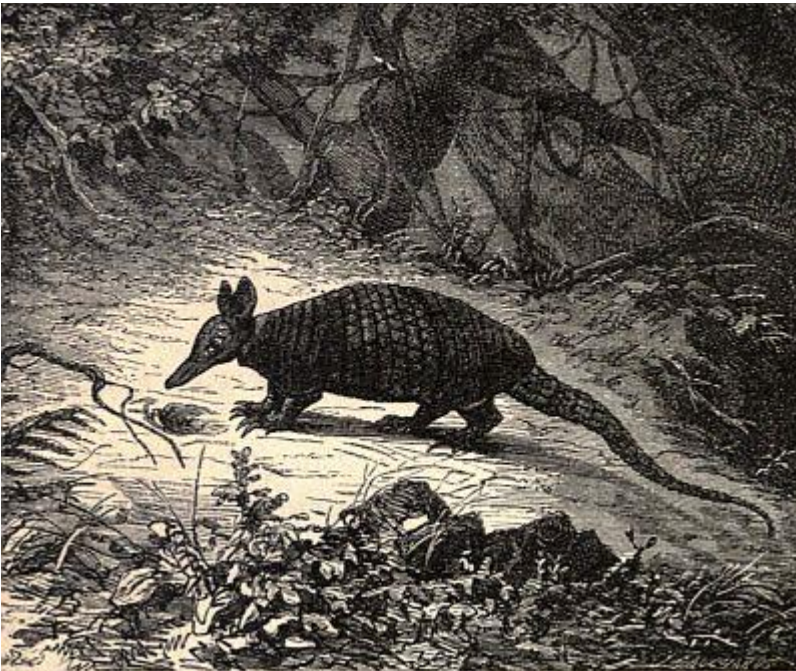
"Do you think that they will first devour l'Encuerado, and then attack us?"

"You needn't be frightened; courage is not one of their virtues. Unless they were starving, they wouldn't venture near us."

All at once we heard a shot. The whole forest seemed in movement; the cries of the birds resounded through the trees, and the echoes repeated the noise of the report. Gringalet barked loudly, and was again answered by the harsh cry of the coyotas. At length the silence, which for a short time had been disturbed, was once more restored, and the forest resumed its solemn stillness.



[104]



CHAPTER VII.

THE CATS'-EYES POMADE.—ARMADILLO.—LUCIEN AND THE CRUEL FERN.—THE
FALLEN MOUNTAIN.—THE WOODPECKER.—THE BASILISK.—L'ENCUERADO'S FRESH
IDEA.

Gringaleto, who had been the first to give the alarm, was also the first to go to sleep again. I could not help waiting with some degree of anxiety for l'Encuerado's return. In a quarter of an hour, as the Indian did not arrive, I began to think that, confused by the darkness, he had missed finding our bivouac. After having called him two or three times, without receiving any answer, I was just going to fire off my gun, so that the noise of the report might serve as a guide to him, when I heard the sound of his guttural cry.[105]

"What on earth has possessed you to chase useless game at this hour of the night?" I cried, as he came into sight.

"I felt bound to give these screeching animals a lesson, señor; if I hadn't done so, they would have come back to disturb us every night," answered the Indian, gravely.

"Have you killed any of them?"

"I only managed to wound one. I followed it—"

"At the risk of falling into some pit. You can't see at night—at least, as far as I know."

"Not very well; but that is all your fault," replied l'Encuerado, in a reproachful tone.

"What! my fault?"

"The *brujos* (sorcerers) have many a time offered me an ointment made of cats' eyes and fat; but they wanted too much for it. You knew much more about it than the sorcerers; and if you would only have told me the way to make the ointment, and how to use it, I should have been able to see at night, long enough ago, which would be quite as useful to you as to me."

This was an old story, and all that I could have said to the Indian would not have convinced him that I could not make him see in the dark.

It was broad daylight when Sumichrast awoke us. The brook, which we could cross at a leap, sometimes rippled over pebbles, and sometimes glided silently over a sandy bottom. The plants which grew on its two banks fraternally intertwined their green branches, and their flowers seemed to exchange their perfumes. From the boughs of the large trees hung gray mosses, which made them look like gigantic old men; the sun gilded their black trunks with its rising beams, and from the tops of the trees the sweet chant of birds rose up towards heaven. Our eyes, which had become accustomed to the comparatively barren places we had traversed the day before, dwelt with delight[106] upon this lovely and glorious scene; our hearts rejoiced in the

midst of this calm and luxuriant aspect of nature. It was with feelings of regret we got ready to move on again.

"Suppose we weren't to go till the afternoon," said Sumichrast.

"Suppose we don't go till to-morrow," I answered.

These ideas seemed so thoroughly to respond to the wish of all, that, in a moment, our travelling gear was scattered again on the ground. The first thing we did was to take a bath; then the thought struck us that we had better wash our clothes. Lucien, helped by l'Encuerado, who had nothing to wash for himself, as he wore his leather garment next to his skin, laughed heartily at seeing us turned into washerwomen; still he did not do his part of the work at all badly. He then undertook to wash Gringalet, whose white coat, spotted with black, was sadly in want of cleansing. Unfortunately, the dog was hardly out of the water when he began rolling himself in the dust, and, as dirty as ever, came frisking around his disappointed little master.

We were roaming about in every direction, in the hope of collecting some insects, when Gringalet pricked up his ears and showed his teeth. The rustling of dry leaves attracted our attention to a slope opposite to us, on which an armadillo was seen.

Generally speaking, these animals only go out for food in the night. This one, which we saw in broad daylight, was about the size of a large rabbit. Pricking up its ears, it raised its tapering muzzle so as to snuff closer to the branches. Its head, which was very small, gave it a very grotesque appearance. Suddenly it began scratching up the earth with its front paws, furnished with formidable claws, and now and then poked its pointed nose into the hole it had dug. I had crossed the stream, and was advancing cautiously towards the animal, when I saw it leave off its work, and, bending[107] down its head uneasily, as quick as lightning it rolled itself up into a ball and glided down the slope. Just at my feet it stopped, and I only had to stoop down in order to pick it up. Gringalet, who then appeared at the top of the slope, was evidently the cause of its sudden flight.

I rejoined my companions, carrying my prisoner, who tried neither to defend itself nor to escape. Lucien examined with curiosity the scales which crossed the back of the armadillo, and its pink transparent skin. I told him that this inoffensive animal, which feeds on insects and roots, belonged to the order Edentata—mammals in which the system of teeth is incomplete.

"But," said he, "I have seen pictures in which armadillos are represented with armor formed of small squares."

"That is another species, which also lives in Mexico," replied Sumichrast.

When we talked about killing the animal, Lucien opposed the idea with great vehemence. He wanted either to carry it away alive or to let it go—both being plans which could not be allowed. Gringalet, however, cut short the discussion by strangling it, l'Encuerado's carelessness having left it in his way. The boy, both angry and distressed, was astonished at the cruelty of his dog, and was going to beat him.

"He has only yielded to instinct," said Sumichrast.

"A fine instinct, truly," replied Lucien, in tears, "to kill a poor beast that never did him any harm!"

"He has saved us the trouble of killing it. Men, and all carnivorous animals, can not live except on the condition of sacrificing other creatures. Didn't you shoot a squirrel yesterday? And you did not refuse your share of those beautiful birds, the plumage of which so delighted you."

"Yes, but I did not strangle the squirrel with my teeth. It's a very different thing." [108]

"For you, very probably; but it was much the same to the squirrel. However, if there's another chance, you shall lend your gun to Gringalet."

Lucien smiled through his tears, and his indignation gradually calmed down. Certainly the result is the same, whether you wring a fowl's neck or shoot it; yet I could never make up my mind to the former operation. Lucien, who was endowed with almost feminine sensibility, was often angry with l'Encuerado, who could scarcely resist the temptation of firing at any thing alive, useful or not, which came within reach of his gun. We had spoken often enough to the Indian on the subject, but he always asserted that if God had allowed man to kill for the purpose of food, He had also ordered him to destroy hurtful animals, as they were the allies of the demon. Unfortunately, horses and dogs excepted, all animals were hurtful in l'Encuerado's eyes.

Gun on shoulder, we made our way up the bed of the stream, often being obliged to cut our path through a thicket of plants. I noticed a fine tree-fern, the leaves of which, not yet developed, assumed the shape of a bishop's crosier. Lucien remarked this.

"You are right," said I, "it is very curious. Do you know Jussieu divided all vegetables into three great orders—*Acotyledons*, *Monocotyledons*, and *Dicotyledons*. Ferns belong to the first; [\[K\]](#) they have no visible flowers, and are allied to the sea-weed and mushroom tribe. It is only under the tropics that ferns attain the dimensions of the one you are looking at; in colder regions their height seldom exceeds a few feet. Ferns

formed almost the sole vegetation of the primitive world, and we frequently find evidence of some gigantic species which are now extinct."

[109]

Lucien, being desirous to examine the crosier-shaped stalks, allowed us to get in front of him, then crept under the fern.

As the leaves of this shrub are furnished underneath with long prickles, when he wanted to rejoin us he found himself caught. The more he struggled the worse he became entangled. He cried out to me in a most distressed voice, and not knowing what had happened, I lost no time in going back to him. I found him fighting hard against the thorns which were scratching his face and hands. L'Encuerado and Sumichrast also came to his assistance.

I disentangled the boy as quickly as I could; but already he had several scratches over his face and hands.

"How came you not to think," I said, "that by struggling in this way you would only the more entangle yourself?"

"I saw you all leaving me; I scarcely knew what held me back, and I got quite frightened; but I'm not crying, papa, and yet the fern-prickles scratch terribly."

L'Encuerado turned up his sleeves, and, seizing his *machete*, rushed at the fern.

"Are not you ashamed to attack a child?" he cried. "It's all very fine to display your bishop's crosier and then behave in this way! Try and tear my coat! I know you wouldn't dare to do it! Never mind, though! I'll punish you for your malice."

The poor plant, alas! was soon cut down; thus the growth of years was destroyed in a few minutes.

After an hour's walking, the head of our little column suddenly came in front of a whole mountain-side which had slid from its original position. The sight was a magnificent one; the accumulation of rocks, piled one on the other, had crushed down in their fall the trees that impeded their course. We saw before us an inextricable pile[110] of trunks, monstrous roots, and masses of rock, suspended and apparently ready to fall. The catastrophe must have recently occurred; for here and there a branch was still covered with foliage, and the grass had not as yet carpeted the immense gap. Lucien was so astonished at the wild grandeur of the scene that it actually put an end to his chatter. Without speaking, we joined Sumichrast, who was in advance. That a lagoon must have been filled up by the avalanche of rocks, we saw

certain indications. We could hear the rumbling noise of water flowing beneath us. On our left, at the foot of the mountain, extended a wide basin, which, from its regular outline, might well have been made by the hand of man.

Every thing seemed silent and deserted around us, although the bushes that margined the edge of the lagoon must once have sheltered many a guest; now the imposing grandeur of the scene had awed them, or driven them off.

"How could such a great mass as this fall down?" asked Lucien.

"We can only conjecture," replied Sumichrast; "perhaps the stream flowing beneath the base of the rocks had excavated fissures, and thus undermined it."

"The noise must have been terrific," said Lucien.

"Doubtless it was," replied Sumichrast; "and the shock possibly felt for many leagues round."

"Have you ever seen a mountain fall in two like that, M. Sumichrast?"

"Yes; I did five years ago, when I was in company with your father. A whole forest disappeared before our eyes in a land-slip, which also overwhelmed four or five Indian huts. In a year from the present time, the wilderness of bare rocks that we see before us will be again covered with thick vegetation; mosses will grow over these gray-colored[111] rocks, and the stream will have renewed its course. If chance should ever lead us again to this spot, the rich foliage and flowers would almost prevent our recognizing the desolation which now impresses us so much."

I crossed the stream, in order to reach our bivouac by the opposite bank to that which we had hitherto followed. Suddenly a noise, like a mallet striking the trunk of a tree, attracted our attention.

"You told me just now there was no one but ourselves in the forest," cried Lucien.

"Chut!" replied l'Encuerado; "it is nothing but a large woodpecker."

And each of us glided under the bushes and tried to get near the winged workman, who so loudly betrayed his presence. Ten minutes elapsed, but all was silent, and the object of our search appeared to have moved off. In fact, we were about to give up the pursuit, when three blows, struck at regular intervals, resounded near us.

The *Carpintero* (carpenter), for such it is called in Mexico, has very brilliant yellow eyes, red feathers upon the head, while the body is dark-colored streaked with white. It climbs easily up the trunks of trees, resting upon its tail-feathers. At length we

observed it, and as we looked, admiring its plumage, it again struck three resounding blows, and ran round the tree as if to inspect the other side.

"The fool!" muttered l'Encuerado; "he thinks he can pierce a tree as thick as my body with three pecks of his beak! He'll soon be eaten."

And he fired at the bird and hit it.

"I say, papa, did the woodpecker really want to pierce this big tree?"

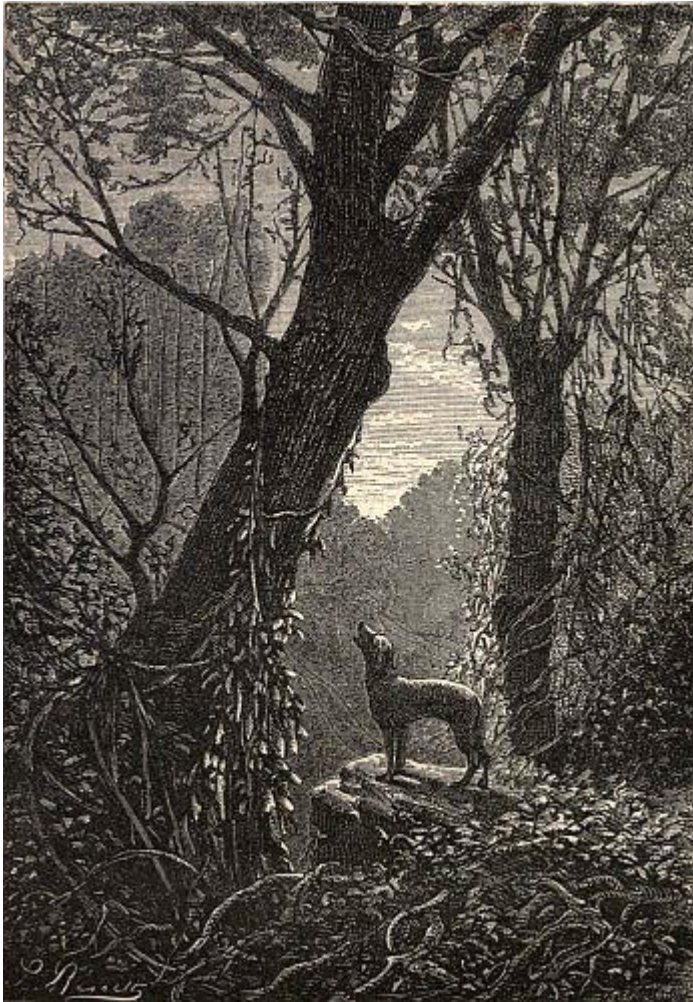
"No, my boy; that is a popular but unfounded idea. The woodpecker strikes the trees in order to frighten the insects that are concealed under the bark; and the action[112] which l'Encuerado has interpreted in his own way is performed with a view of getting hold of the fugitives."

Sumichrast showed Lucien that the woodpecker, aided by its wedge-shaped beak, could, in case of need, rip up the bark under which its prey was to be found; that his tongue, covered with spines bending backward, is well adapted to seize the larvæ; and, lastly, that the stiff and elastic feathers of its tail afford it a very useful support in the exercise of its laborious vocation.

"You often get the better of me in argument," said l'Encuerado; "but it's no use your saying that woodpeckers do not bore into trees, for I have seen them doing it."

"You are right, up to a certain point," replied Sumichrast; "some species make their nests in dead trees, which their beaks can with ease penetrate. As for piercing sound trees, that's quite another question."

While l'Encuerado was preparing the armadillo and the woodpecker, which we were to have for dinner, we walked down the course of the stream, the agreeable freshness of which was very pleasant to us. All at once Lucien pointed out to me a basilisk sitting on a stone, the rays of the sun setting off its bright shades—yellow, green, and red. This member of the Iguana family, which bears no resemblance to the fabulous basilisk of the Greeks, got up at our approach, puffed out its throat, and shook the membranous crest on the top of its head. Its bright eye seemed to scan the horizon; no doubt it caught sight of us, for its flaccid body stiffened out, and with a rapid bound it sprang into the stream. The reptile raised its chest in swimming, beating the water with its fore paws as if with oars. We soon lost sight of it, to Lucien's great sorrow, for he wanted to obtain a further inspection of it.[114]



"The dog began to howl

desperately."

[115]Gathering round the fire, we arranged our baggage, ready to start the next morning. As there was still another hour's daylight, Lucien remained with l'Encuerado, and I went with Sumichrast to reconnoitre the route we intended to take.

The sun was setting, and we were slowly approaching our bivouac, when Gringalet's whine met our ears. I hastened forward, for the dog began to howl desperately. I reached the hut quite out of breath. Every thing seemed right, but Lucien and l'Encuerado had disappeared. I looked anxiously into my companion's face.

"No doubt," said Sumichrast, "l'Encuerado has gone to take a stroll, and left the dog asleep."

I raised a call-cry. What was my surprise at hearing it answered from up above us. My son and the Indian were sitting thirty feet from the ground, hidden in the foliage of a gigantic tree. My first impulse was to address l'Encuerado rather angrily.

"Don't flurry him," said Sumichrast; "he'll need all his presence of mind to get the boy down safely."

With an anxiety which may be easily understood, I watched all the movements of the lad, who was every now and then concealed by the leaves.

"Gently," cried l'Encuerado; "put your foot there. Well done! Now lay hold of this branch and slide down. Don't be afraid; I'll not let you go. How pleased and proud your papa will be when he knows how high you have climbed!"

The Indian was wrong; I was neither pleased nor proud. The trunk of the tree was five or six feet in circumference; the first branches sprang at a point no less than seven to ten feet from the ground, and I could not make out how the boy managed to reach them. As for l'Encuerado, or rather the *ape* that went by that name, I knew that no obstacle could stop *him*.

I must, however, confess that I felt all my anger melting[116] away when I saw the skill and coolness of the young acrobat. Certainly, Sumichrast appealed to my own reminiscences, and offered to lay me a wager that I had climbed many a poplar without the advantage of such superintendence as l'Encuerado's. At last the two gymnasts reached the lowest branches, and I breathed more freely.

"Papa," cried the child, "we climbed right to the top, and there found a nest and a squirrel's hiding-place."

"Have you suddenly gone mad?" said I, interrupting him and addressing the Indian.

"Mad!" repeated he, with the most sublime simplicity. "Why?"

"Couldn't you have chosen a tree that was not so tall?"

"Don't you wish Chanito to learn to climb? At all events, the señora intrusted him to me."

"And so you risk his breaking his bones?"

"I'm not a child," replied the Indian, proudly, standing upright on a branch.

"Enough of these gymnastics! Come down at once; although God knows how you are going to manage it."

The words were hardly out of my mouth when Lucien reached the ground, suspended by a *lasso* which l'Encuerado had tied under his arms. The Indian had pulled him up to the lowest branches in the same way.

"You have not acted sensibly," said I to the Indian; "we do not begin to learn to ride by mounting a wild horse. Lucien doesn't know yet how to climb high trees."

"Lucien can climb as well as I can," retorted the culprit; "he has never eaten an orange out of your garden without clambering up to gather it himself."

"That's something new to me," said I, looking hard at my son, who blushed. "At any rate, orange-trees are very different in size from cotton-woods, so you risked killing him." [117]

"No; I kept tight hold of him. You very well know that if Chanito were likely to come to his death by my fault, I should die first."

"That wouldn't bring the boy to life again. There will be plenty of dangers in our excursion without seeking them out for mere pleasure. I want to bring you all back safe and sound to Orizava; therefore, don't let us have any more of these ascents."

Having uttered this remonstrance, I turned on my heel, for it was no use trying to have the last word with l'Encuerado. I was, however, quite sure that he would not renew the exploit which had displeased me, and that was all I wished.

At supper-time, Gringalet did not show any repugnance to the flesh of the armadillo, the taste of which reminded Lucien of sucking-pig.

"Are armadillos very scarce?" he asked; "they are never sold in the market."

"Just the contrary," replied Sumichrast; "they are very common, and the Indians never fail to feast on them when they can procure them."

"What does the name armadillo mean?"

"It is a Paraguayan word, the meaning of which is, 'encased in armor.' The Aztecs call the animal *ayotochitl*, that is, 'gourd-rabbit'—'rabbit' on account of its ears, and 'gourd' because, when it rolls itself up in a ball, it reminds one of that vegetable."

L'Encuerado had gone to sleep. Lucien soon went into the hut, and I noticed that Sumichrast carefully arranged the leaves which were to form our bed, although he himself lay down anywhere. I was much less inclined for sleep than my companions, and contemplated them all reposing; reflecting on the strange chance which united, under the same shelter, in the midst of the wilderness, persons born [118] of such distinct races and in such different climates. We could all surely depend on one another, for in previous expeditions our mutual friendship had been put to the proof. Seeing how well Lucien bore the fatigue, I rejoiced that I had brought him under the protection of such good guardians. When I entered the hut to seek repose, I disturbed

Gringalet, who, before lying down again by his young master, licked his hand: here was another devoted friend—"the dog, which combines all man's better qualities," as Charlet observes.



[119]



CHAPTER VIII.

A VULTURE'S FEAST.—DRAGON'S BLOOD.—A CORAL SERPENT.—THE OWL.—
MEXICAN MOLES.—TOUCANS.—THE SCOLOPACIDÆ.—L'ENCUERADO TURNED
TAILOR.—SUNSET.

We left our bivouac at daybreak, first ascending and then descending, sometimes making our way through thickets and other times through glades; suddenly a flock of vultures attracted our attention. A hideous spectacle was now presented to our eyes. A *coyote*—doubtless that which l'Encuerado had wounded the day before—lay half devoured on the ground, and more than fifty guests were coming in turn for their share, and to tear, in turn, a strip of flesh from the carcass.[120]

"What frightful creatures!" cried Lucien. "I can't think why the nasty smell does not drive them away."

"It is just the reverse; it is the smell which attracts them," I replied. "Even when they are soaring high up in the sky, and scan the horizon with their yellow eyes, their subtle sense of smell enables them to catch the effluvia of the putrefied matter on which they feed."

In some of the towns of Mexico the black vultures are so numerous—living there, as they do, almost tame in the streets—that our young companion was well acquainted with these birds; but he had never been present at one of their joint meals. The sight of one of their bare, black, and wrinkled necks, plunged into the body of the animal, made him almost ill.

"Poh!—what disgusting birds!" he cried.

"You are wrong," I said; "the birds are only obeying the instinct implanted in them. Henceforward you will understand better the name of the 'rapacious order' or 'birds of prey,' which is given by naturalists to vultures, eagles, falcons, and owls. You are aware that the science which describes the habits of birds is called *ornithology*. Cuvier, the great classifier, divides the feathered tribe into six orders—birds of prey, passerines, climbers, gallinaceans, wading, and web-footed birds. In order to prevent confusion, the orders have been subdivided into families, the families into groups, the groups into genera, and the genera into species."

"How are they all to be recognized?"

"By the study of certain special characteristics, which serve as distinguishing marks. Birds of prey, for instance, have curved beaks and claws, legs feathered either to the knee or down to the foot, three toes in front, and one behind; also, the back and inside

toe are stronger than the others. The vultures which you are looking at, the only[121] birds of the order which live in flocks, belong to the *Cathartus* genus."



"A flock of vultures attracted our attention."

[123]"Look! there are some which keep at a distance. They look as if they were afraid."

"No; they have gorged themselves, and are now digesting their meal; unless danger compel them to take flight, they will remain motionless until sunset."

"Will they attack live creatures?"

"Very rarely; for they are dreadful cowards, and, besides, do not care much for fresh meat."

We had now left far behind us the miserable crew of carrion-eaters, when Lucien suddenly cried out—

"Oh, papa! look, there's a bleeding tree!"

"It is a *pterocarpus*; that is, a vegetable with membranes resembling the wing of a bird. The red sap which is trickling down from its bark is called *dragon's blood*, thus named by the Greeks, who ascribed to it a fabulous origin. The *blood-tree*, for so the Indians designate it, is allied to the asparagus and lily genera, and the gum which exudes from it is a good remedy for dysentery."

L'Encuerado picked off a few dry flakes of this invaluable production; and then, dipping his finger into some of the drops which were still liquid, he rubbed it all over Gringalet's legs and paws, who was thus provided with red top-boots. As a matter of fact, this operation must have had a good effect upon the animal; for this gum, being very rich in tannin, was certain to brace the tissues and muscles; but the first sensation of it seemed to distress the poor beast, who ran along lifting up his legs in a very comical fashion.

"Gringalet walks very much in the same way that L'Encuerado[124] did the time he put on his beautiful blue slippers," remarked Lucien, in great glee.

"You don't mean to say," said Sumichrast, "that L'Encuerado ever wore blue slippers?"

"Yes; the other day there was a dinner-party, and mamma told him to dress himself as well as he could. He at once ran off to buy a pair of pumps he had seen in a shop, and, just at the moment they were all sitting down to dinner, he made his appearance in his new foot-coverings, and—a cravat!"

"A cravat!" repeated Sumichrast, more surprised than ever.

"Yes, a real cravat; but as he had never before worn any thing on his feet but sandals, he lifted them up when he walked just as Gringalet does now. Mamma advised him to put on his sandals again; but he would not obey her, so he was well punished, for he tripped up and broke a whole pile of plates. It was not until after this misfortune that he could be persuaded to take off his blue pumps; and even then he could not bear to part with them altogether, so he hung them round his neck, and kept on waiting at table, as proud as possible with his grand decoration."

This adventure was only too true, and Sumichrast listened to it with shouts of laughter.

"Why did you hang the shoes round your neck instead of putting them away in a corner?" asked Sumichrast of the Indian.

"I did it to let all the world know that I had bought them, and that they belonged to me," replied L'Encuerado.



"Lucien loudly called out to me."

Our encampment was established at the entrance of a fresh glade. L'Encuerado had killed five or six small birds; we were, therefore, certain of something for dinner. We had scarcely finished our building operations, when[127] Lucien, who had been prowling about, lifting up stones and looking under stumps in order to find insects, loudly called out to me. When I got up to him, I saw at the bottom of a hole a coral-serpent, measuring about a yard in length. The reptile was coiled up, and remained motionless while we admired its beautiful red skin, divided at intervals with rings of shining black. L'Encuerado promptly cut a forked stick and pinned the animal down to the ground. The prisoner immediately tried to stand up on end; its jaws distended, and its head assumed a menacing aspect. Gringalet barked at it furiously, without, however, daring to go near. The Indian unsheathed his cutlass—the prospect of an unlooked-for addition to dinner quite delighted him.

The flesh of the serpent is a well-known Indian dish. Previous to the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, the rattlesnake itself found its place at their highest festivals. Dioscorides[M] prescribed the flesh of the viper as a tonic, and it formed one

of the component parts of *theriaca*, the great panacea of our ancestors, which was one of the principal branches of Venetian commerce. In spite of all these precedents, the dish proposed by l'Encuerado was unanimously rejected.

Having cut off the serpent's head, we all went off to reconnoitre. Going in pursuit of a troop of squirrels, we were led to the edge of the glade without having been able to reach them. A little way in the forest, Sumichrast espied a small russet-colored owl, which suddenly disappeared in a hollow at the foot of an old tree. We all kept quiet for ten minutes, in order to observe the bird's way of hunting. At last it suddenly reappeared, and, standing motionless and upright upon its legs at the entrance of its place of refuge, it looked very like a sentinel on duty in his watch-box.[128] Suddenly it started, and slightly bending its body, winked its great yellow eyes several times; then, skimming over the ground with the swiftness of an arrow, it darted into the high grass. It soon made its appearance again, with its feathers erect and flapping its wings. It held in its mouth a poor little mouse, which it carried off into its subterraneous retreat. It was the species of owl called *Athene hypogæa*, which is often met with in the savannahs, and hunts in the day-time as well as in the night.

"What a comical-looking bird!" said Lucien; "and yet I'm half afraid of its brilliant eyes and hooked nose."

"Every one is frightened at him, Chanito," replied l'Encuerado; "and when he settles near a hut at night, and raises his dismal cry, he predicts the early death of some one of those who hear him."

"That can't be," replied Lucien, "for there was an owl in a hole in our garden wall, and papa would never have it disturbed; yet the owl made its cry every night."

"Your father knows how to avert the spell. Besides, the bird that lived in the wall was a common owl."

"Both in Europe and America," interposed Sumichrast, "screech owls, and their kinsmen, the common owls, barn owls, buzzards, and all nocturnal birds of prey, are looked upon by the ignorant as birds of ill omen. Their strange appearance and their mysterious habits give rise to a repugnance which often changes into fear. It is quite wrong to have any dread of them; as a matter of fact, the bird you have just seen is, like all its species, more useful than injurious to man, for it destroys a vast number of small mammals—jerboas, shrew-mice, dormice, and field-mice, which ravage the farmer's crops. You will recollect that the owl, among the ancient Greeks, was the bird of Minerva; with the Aztecs it represents the goddess of evil."

A little way from the spot where we lost sight of the[129] mouse-eater, there were some enormous holes dug out by the *tuzas*,[\[N\]](#) the Mexican moles, so dreaded by agriculturists. This animal is about the size of a kitten; it lives in companies, and works underneath the surface of the soil in a way very dangerous to travellers, who suddenly find the ground sink under their feet. L'Encuerado, who was very fond of the flesh of the tuza, which used to be sold in the Indian markets, placed himself in ambush in the hopes of killing one. Five minutes had scarcely elapsed when we heard a gunshot, and the hunter made his appearance with a rather ugly little animal, having a dark-brown coat, short feet, ears and eyes almost imperceptible, a mouth furnished with formidable incisors, and on each side of its jaws a vast pouch filled with earth. Lucien declared that he would never consent to eat of this creature, and promised his share to l'Encuerado.

Our attention was again attracted towards the forest by the cries of five or six *toucans*, and again we set off in chase. These birds are extremely suspicious, and their capricious flight almost baffles pursuit. I succeeded, however, in killing one; the others flew off, raising cries of anger.

"How can they bear the weight of such an enormous beak?" asked Lucien, who had run to pick up the bird, and was struck with admiration at its beautiful green and yellow plumage.

"Nature has made provision for that: the enormous beak, which seems so heavy, is composed of a very light porous substance."

"Then it can not eat any thing hard?"

"No; its flexible beak could not crush any unyielding substance, and it feeds on nothing but soft fruits; and even[130] these it breaks up awkwardly. If we could have got near them, you would have seen them plucking berries and tossing them in the air, so as to catch them in their immense jaws."

"What good is its great mouth?"

"I can't say; for the naturalists, who have been as much puzzled as you are by this peculiarity, have been unable to explain it."

"Then I am more learned than they are," said l'Encuerado, with a magisterial air.

"Do you know, then, why toucans have such exaggerated beaks?"

"Because they have been made by a wise Creator," replied the Indian.

"No doubt about that," remarked Sumichrast, smiling; "but the point is, why they were made so."

"Because their beak, calcined and reduced to powder, is the only efficacious remedy for epilepsy. Toucans are very scarce birds, and if their beaks were no larger than those of other birds of their size, this medicine could never be obtained in sufficient quantities."

L'Encuerado's explanation was perhaps as good as our uncertainty. I remember that the Indians do, in fact, make a great mystery of a powder against epilepsy, and that a toucan's head may often be noticed hanging up to the wall of a hut, as a preservative against St. Vitus' dance.

Instead of resting, Lucien prowled about in every direction, breaking away bark, and lifting stones with all the ardor of a neophyte in entomology. Since meeting with the coral-serpent, he took precautions which gave me confidence; for it is quite uncertain how a reptile or any other creature may behave when it is disturbed. The child suddenly called out to me; he had just discovered a nest of *scolopendræ*, commonly called centipedes, and he was afraid^[131] to touch them. The centipedes, surprised at being disturbed, rolled themselves up; their pale blue color somewhat diminishing the repugnance which their appearance generally excites. It was not without some hesitation that Lucien, encouraged by Sumichrast, ventured to place one on the palm of his hand; the insect gradually unrolled its articulations, each of which was provided with two pairs of feet ending in hooks, but its walk was so slow as rather to disappoint the young observer.

"What is the use of having forty-four feet," he cried, "if the centipede can not get on faster than a *carabus*, which only has six?"

L'Encuerado could alone explain this mystery; but still he kept silence.

"Are these creatures poisonous, M. Sumichrast?"

"It is said so; but some species—that, for instance, which you are examining—may be handled without danger."

"Here is a little centipede with only twelve legs."

"It has only just come out of the egg; their rings increase in number as they grow older, and this is one of their peculiarities."

"How hard the rings, are! they are almost like armor."

"It is armor, in fact; the *scolopendræ* form a line of demarkation, so to speak, separating insects from crustaceans; centipedes are not very distant relations of lobsters."

"Look, papa! I have just found a chocolate-colored worm, which looks like a centipede."

"That's not a worm; it is an *iulus*, first cousin to the centipede. Don't take it up in your hand, for it will impregnate your fingers with a sickening odor."

We resumed our progress towards our encampment, Lucien and l'Encuerado preceding us. The weather was warm without being suffocating; the slanting rays of the sun were moderated by the foliage, the birds were singing,[132] and to-day, like yesterday, seemed as if it would be one of the least fatiguing in our journey. We were now in the midst of the *Terre-Tempérée*, and were surrounded by white and black oaks. Ceibas, elm, cedars, and *lignum-vitæ* trees only grew here and there; and the mosquitoes, so plentiful in the *Terre-Chaude*, did not trouble us here. The timber, growing widely apart, allowed us to pass easily; we were in a virgin-forest, but were still too high up above the plains to have to struggle against the inextricable net-work of tropical creepers.

The *tuza* made its appearance at our dinner, dressed with rice. Although the appearance of this animal is repulsive, its flesh has an exquisite flavor. I offered a piece of the thigh to Lucien; he found it so nice, that he soon held out his plate—or rather his calabash—for more. Sumichrast told him he was eating some of the mole, though not aware of it: he appeared confused at first, but soon boldly began on his second helping. After the meal, l'Encuerado took from an aloe-fibre bag a needle and bodkin, and set to work to mend Lucien's breeches, torn a day or two before. Two squirrels' skins were scarcely sufficient for the would-be tailor, who lined the knees also with this improvised cloth. Lucien was delighted at this patching, and wanted to try on his mended garment at once. He waddled about, ran, and stooped in every posture, quite fascinated with the rustling noise produced by the dry skins. Gringalet, who had been asleep, suddenly came up to his young master with visible surprise. With his neck stretched out, his eyes glittering, and his ears drooping, ready to retreat in case of need, the dog ventured to take a sniff at l'Encuerado's work, then shook his head energetically and sneezed. After repeating this operation two or three times he seemed to be lost in thought.

"He knows all about it, and can see at once that it is[133] not badly sewn," said l'Encuerado, with evident satisfaction.

But all of a sudden, after a final and more conscientious examination, the animal began barking furiously, and seizing hold of the patches that had been so industriously sewn in, he tried to tear them away.

"The simpleton fancies the squirrel is still alive!" cried the Indian.

Although driven away at least twenty times, Gringalet kept on returning to the attack, and he assailed the trowsers with so much ardor that a fresh rent was made. Then l'Encuerado became angry, and the dog having been punished, went and crouched down by the fire; but he still continued to show his teeth at the strange lining which seemed so offensive to him.

The sun was setting; its golden rays, quivering among the branches, appeared one by one to get higher and higher until gloom began gradually to pervade the forest. We were assembled around our bivouac, when a rosy tint suddenly illumined the tops of the trees and penetrated through the foliage. As this marvellous effect of light appeared to last a considerable time, we again went into the open glade, so as to be better able to observe it. The sky appeared as if it was all in a blaze; vast glittering jets of light seemed as if darting from the setting sun; a few clouds, tinted with bright red color, flitted across the heavens. The bright gleam became more and more vivid, but without at all dazzling our eyes. A few birds might be heard uttering shrill cries; and the falcons, who were making their way to their aeries, stopped for a moment their rapid flight, and whirled round and round in space with an undecided air.

"The wind will blow tremendously to-morrow," said l'Encuerado; "only once before did I ever see the sky lighted up as it is to-night, and then two days after there[134] was a frightful hurricane, which demolished most of the huts in our village."

"I think we shall get off with nothing but a south wind like that which worried us the day we set off," said Sumichrast.

Wrongly or rightly, I attributed this phenomenon of light to the position of the clouds. The intensity of the light decreased till it was nothing but a glimmer. Night resumed its empire, and there was naught to guide us back to our bivouac but the flame of our fire.



[135]



CHAPTER IX.

THE SOUTH WIND.—THE HURRICANE.—A FEARFUL NIGHT.—THE UPROOTED GIANT.—THE SARSAPARILLA-PLANT.—GRINGALET DISCOVERS A SPRING.—OUR BIVOUAC.

L'Encuerado's prediction seemed as if it was likely to be realized. About three o'clock in the morning we were awakened by a hoarse roaring; the trees seemed to shiver; sometimes the uproar appeared to grow less and almost to cease, and then broke out again louder than ever. I hastened to warm some coffee; but two or three times the intermittent squalls scattered the burning fagots of our fire, and the hot ashes nearly blinded us. This mishap was owing to the open glade being so near to us, across which the wind rushed furious and unrestrained. Almost before[136] daylight appeared, I led my companions farther under the trees, the state of the atmosphere making me feel very uncomfortable. The lofty tree-tops, roughly shaken by the wind, showered down upon us a perfect hail of twigs and dead leaves. We were almost deafened by the noise of the clashing boughs; sad and silent we proceeded on our way, perceiving no signs of any living creature, and in much trouble how we should obtain our dinners.

Towards mid-day, the wind fell; puffs of heat, which seemed to spring from the ground beneath, almost suffocated us. Lucien did not say a word, but, in spite of my advice, he was constantly lifting his gourd to his lips, a proceeding which could only excite his thirst. Gringalet, instead of frolicking about, as was his custom, followed us closely, drooping his ears and tail. We were, I believe, the only living beings moving under the shade, which now seemed converted into a hot furnace.

Meeting with some rocks, we made up our minds to hurry on, thinking to come upon a stream; a vain hope!—the rocks soon came to an end, and were succeeded by a perfect labyrinth of trees. If there had only been a little grass, we should have set to work to construct our hut; for the dry heat, blown up by the south wind, rendered exertion almost unbearable.

A second time we found ourselves among rocks; but they were so enormous, and so close together, that it was evident we were in the vicinity of a mountain.

"Hiou! hiou! Chanito," cried the Indian, joyously; "forward! forward! we are very nearly at the end of our troubles."

The boy smiled and adopted the swift pace of his guide, while Sumichrast lengthened his strides so as to get in front of me. Following my companions, we soon came upon a dry, barren spot in front of a steep ascent. After we had[137] all taken breath, I gave it as my opinion that we should overcome our fatigue and scale the side of the mountain; but no one showed any inclination to move.

My poor Lucien lay panting on the hard stones, with his mouth dry, his lips bleeding, and his face purple with the heat; he had thought the day's work was over.

Nevertheless, as soon as he saw us starting again, up he got and followed us without a word of complaint. I wished to lighten his burden; but he heroically refused, and proportioned his pace to that of l'Encuerado. Gringalet was continually sitting down, and hanging out his tongue to a most enormous length; it was, doubtless, his way of testifying that he moved an amendment against the length of the journey.

"We were quite wrong in finding fault with the shade," said Sumichrast; "for in this unsheltered spot the heat is more insupportable than under the trees. The sun seems to dart into us as if its rays were needles' points."

"Don't drink, Chanito! don't drink!" cried l'Encuerado to Lucien.

The poor little fellow replaced the gourd at his side, and bent on me such a heart-rending look that I caught him up in my arms.

"Let us make a halt," said my friend, who was sheltering himself under a gigantic rock; "I confess that I am dead-beat."

It was a great relief when we were seated down and deprived of our burdens; but, instead of setting to work, according to our usual custom, to collect wood for our fire and to construct our hut, we remained idle, looking at the horizon, without exchanging a single word. At our feet extended, as far as we could see, the tree-tops of an immense forest. We had turned our backs upon the volcano of Orizava; on our right the black summits of the Cordillera stood out against the red sky; the *urubu* vultures were^[138] whirling round and round high up above us—the only living creatures we had set eyes on since the evening before.

It was now four o'clock; a kind of hot blast beat into our faces, producing the same sensation as that experienced in front of a furnace when the door is suddenly opened. The south wind sprung up again, and squall succeeded squall—the forest undulating like a liquid surface.

I in vain endeavored to overcome the state of nervous prostration which had come over me; the terrible wind which parched and burned us took away all power of will. Our eyes were inflamed, our lips cracked, and our heads heavy, and no one cared about eating; all we longed for was water, and we were obliged to watch Lucien, to prevent him emptying his gourd. He was nibbling a morsel of *totopo*, which he, like us, could hardly swallow. Sheltered behind the rock, we contemplated with dread the colossal trees round us, which swayed and bent, sprinkling the ground with their scattered boughs.

The sun set, pale and rayless, as if drowned in the ill-omened yellow clouds. The wind kept puffing and blowing at intervals. A few minutes' lull enabled us to collect a little grass, and then, seated side by side, we watched the approach of night, dark, desolate, and starless; but the comparative coolness of the atmosphere gave some little relief to our exhausted lungs. Lucien went off to sleep; Sumichrast and l'Encuerado tried to follow his example; Gringalet seemed afraid to go far away, and crouched down at our feet. Ere long, I was the only one of the party who was awake.

What an awful night! About nine o'clock the squalls ran riot with unexampled violence; if it had not been for our shelter behind the rock, we should surely have been swept away. From the forest beneath came a roar like[139] that of waves beating against a cliff; branches broke off with an uproar sounding like a series of gun-shots, and the leaves, driven by the wind, covered us with their *débris*. Every now and then an inexplicable and increasing hoarse rumbling filled my mind with anxiety. I listened, holding my breath with fear; the rumbling seemed to approach, as if bringing with it new and unknown perils. Then suddenly, prevailing over the tumult, a formidable crash made itself heard, followed by a shock prolonged by the echoes; it was the fall of some forest giant, vanquished by the hurricane. Sometimes one might have fancied that a multitude of men were fighting together in the darkness that no eye could pierce; there were plainly to be recognized the wild cries of the conflict and the plaintive moans of the wounded; and then, again, a fresh shock shook the earth, and deadened the outburst of the mighty lament.

I must confess that at this moment I bitterly regretted having brought Lucien; I remembered that my friends had predicted to me all the perils which now threatened us. While listening to the uproar of the tempest, I felt my resolution give way, and I had serious thoughts of returning to Orizava the next day.

Towards midnight the storm abated a little, and, giving way to fatigue, I fell asleep.

I had only just closed my eyes when I suddenly jumped up again, deafened as if by a hundred claps of thunder joined in one. The darkness was as thick as ever, and the wind was still more boisterous; the echo of the fallen tree had scarcely died away before another colossus groaned and fell. My companions were now all awake.

"What's the matter, M. Sumichrast?" asked Lucien, in a low tone.

"It is a hurricane, my boy."

"One might fancy that a giant was passing through the[140] wood, shouting and whistling, and breaking down all the trees as he went along."

"I wish that was all," replied Sumichrast; "but it's something much worse; it is the south wind, the sirocco of the Mexican coast."

"Will it sweep us away, M. Sumichrast?"

"I hope not; thanks to the rock which shields us."

A tree now fell close to us, and covered us with dust. [Clinging](#) tightly to one another, every moment brought with it a fresh anxiety. We dared not speak of our feelings, for fear of frightening our young companion, who pressed close up to me. Amidst the universal destruction going on, it only needed a branch driven by the squall to dislodge our shelter, for us to be swept away like chaff before the wind. I had witnessed many a hurricane, but this fearful night exceeded all.

At last daylight appeared; the sun rose gloomily, and exposed the disasters of the terrible night. On every side trees, broken and uprooted, lay prostrate on the ground, or, half suspended by the creepers entangled in their branches, were balanced like the formidable *battering-rams* of the ancients. Lucien was speechless at the sight before his eyes. A sudden cracking noise was heard, and another forest giant slowly bent over, and, describing a rapid curve, crushed its branches against the ground; ten seconds destroyed the work of centuries.

L'Encuerado attempted to go two or three yards beyond our rock; but, surprised by a sudden gust, he had but just time to throw himself prostrate on the ground to prevent being swept away. Something, however, had to be done; it was no use trying to light a fire, and yet, after yesterday's fast and a sleepless night, we felt great need of some comforting beverage. The squalls gradually abated, but were still every now and then violent. Intervals of profound silence^[141] succeeded to the uproar of the storm, when the leaves were motionless; then we might have fancied the tempest was over. But suddenly the frightful roar again commenced, and the gale covered the ground with fresh fragments.

We were beginning to take courage a little, when a formidable crash resounded above us; an enormous pine, growing on the mountain a hundred feet over our heads, tottered and then fell, tumbling down the slope with a horrible uproar. Quick as lightning, L'Encuerado seized Lucien, and lay down with him along the foot of the rock; I and my friend immediately followed his example. The fallen giant came crashing down in rapid bounds, smashing every thing in its path, and accompanied in its descent by masses of broken rock. It struck against the block that sheltered us, which gave forth a dull sound, but fortunately resisted the shock; and then the tree, clearing the obstacle with a prodigious bound, continued its impetuous course down to the

foot of the mountain. We were nearly crushed by a perfect avalanche of stones which followed in its wake.

I raised myself, not without emotion. The danger had been serious; indeed, the enormous rock to which we owed our safety had slightly swerved. If this accident had occurred in the middle of the night, the fright would have driven us out of our place of shelter, and we should certainly have been destroyed. I first returned thanks to God, and then to l'Encuerado, who, being close to Lucien, had shielded the boy with his own body. The child, who fully comprehended the danger, hung round the Indian's neck.

"I shall tell mamma that you saved my life!" cried he, kissing l'Encuerado.

The latter would have replied, but, affected by the caresses of his young favorite, he could only press him in his arms, while two tears trickled down his dark cheeks.[142]

"His lordship, the wind, is very good to take so much trouble to show us his power," exclaimed the Indian, addressing the wind, in order to hide his emotion; "a grand miracle, indeed! to uproot a pine that was going to die of old age, and to roll it down a mountain-side! Why, I could do the same if I chose, with the help of my *machete*. Oh yes! blow away! and knock down another tree on us, and then you'll thoroughly convince us that the devil is your patron!"

In spite of the serious nature of the occurrence, Gringalet was the only one among us who could hear this speech without a smile; and even the dog rubbed up against the orator's legs, as if to show his approval of all he had said.

The hurricane now subsided; but it was likely enough to redouble its intensity at night, and reason dictated that we should take advantage of the calm for moving onward. L'Encuerado resumed his load, and with a watchful eye led the way up the mountain. I took Lucien by the hand; for there was a danger that some tree which had been shaken by the storm might suddenly fall across our path.

The heat, which continued to inconvenience us, rendered walking a very laborious effort. The lips of our young companion were all cracked, and he spoke with difficulty. We suffered dreadfully from thirst; but it was necessary to bear it patiently, and to be very saving with the small stock of water which still remained in our gourds. Soon we came upon the spot where, an hour before, the tree had stood, the fall of which had so nearly crushed us. A widely gaping hole exposed to our view the broken roots of the colossus, and the earth round them was already dry. We pushed on with much difficulty, exhausted, out of breath, and half famished; for, since the night before, we

had eaten nothing but some morsels of maize-cake. Moreover, our[143] eyes were so red and swollen that we were perfectly disfigured.

"Oh, father, I am so tired!" said Lucien to me.

"So we all are, my poor boy; but we must pluck up our spirits again, and keep on walking, for our lives depend on it."

"Father, I am so thirsty! and the water left in my gourd is quite warm."

"It will be better for you not to drink; for a few draughts of water taken when walking increase perspiration, and make the thirst worse, instead of quenching it."

The poor little fellow heaved a sigh, and crept closer to my friend, who advised him to place in his mouth a small pebble, which alleviates thirst by exciting salivation.

In spite of all our exertions, we made little or no advance, and a profuse perspiration added to our exhaustion. Fortunately, every thing seemed to indicate that the tempest was over. L'Encuerado led the way; his manner appeared as if searching for something. At length I saw him throw down his load and plunge into the thicket. Soon he reappeared, with his hands full of a kind of mulberry, the fruit of the sarsaparilla, the acid flavor of which much revived Lucien. We now understood L'Encuerado's peculiar way of walking. He fancied he had noticed a young shoot of this plant, and at first concealed the discovery from us, fearing some deception. I can hardly describe the pleasure that was afforded us by obtaining these berries in such a welcome time. This shrub, with its vine-like and thorny stalk, abounded on the steep slope.

We resumed our march in much better spirits, thanks to this God-send. L'Encuerado filled his cap with them, and walked on bravely, with his head bare. Another half-hour's climbing brought us to the verge of the forest. Suddenly I lost sight of Gringalet. I called him several times, and[144] at last he emerged from a clump of shrubs, with his tail and muzzle wet. Sumichrast rushed in search of the water, and soon cried out to us in a joyous voice—

"A spring! a spring!"



We all tried who could get to it first. Under the foliage of sarsaparilla our companion was kneeling down and catching in his hands a little streamlet of limpid water, which was trickling from between two rocks. With keen enjoyment, he was sprinkling it over his face and arms, an example each of us soon imitated. At last I hurried our party away, for the horrible roaring of the hurricane still seemed to din in my ears, and as yet we had no shelter within our reach. After having filled our gourds, we recommenced our climbing, enlivened by l'Encuerado, who kept on congratulating Gringalet upon his discovery, and promising him, as his reward, a whole series of good dinners.



"Sumichrast halted near three gigantic stones."

The hour was now approaching at which we feared that[147] the hurricane would recommence with redoubled violence; so it became highly necessary to select a spot for our bivouac. Moss and lichens here covered the rocks with a variegated carpet, and, in proportion as we ascended the mountain, the cooler air relieved our lungs. At length our ascent came to an end, and we found ourselves on a plateau dotted over with stunted shrubs, distorted and twisted with the winds and storms. Fresh summits rose in front of us, but they were too far off to cause us any fear. Sumichrast halted near three gigantic stones, placed so as to leave a space between them, in which we could encamp, as if in a fortress.

This spot we selected for our bivouac. The wind still blew in squalls, but the increased clearing of the atmosphere gave us reason to hope that we should have nothing more to fear from the hurricane. We all went in search of firewood, and ere long after were enlivened by the gleam of an immense fire.

At sunset, the glittering beams of the sun's very last rays reached our camp. The sky was blue, and the air was fresh, so I abandoned the idea of returning home. Night came on, a fine rain purified the air, and the damp earth breathed forth a wholesome fragrance. Overcome by fatigue, we wrapped ourselves up in our *sarapés*, and soon fell into a sound sleep.



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CHAPTER X.

THE RABBIT.—WILD POTATOES.—A DIFFICULT PATH.—AN EXTINCT CRATER.—HOAR-FROST.—THE TORRENT.—THE FAWN.—THE TETTIGONES.—THE DRAGON-FLIES.

The next day, when I opened my eyes, the sun was shining brightly in a blue sky. I made up the fire, and walked off, with my gun on my shoulder, to try and obtain some kind of game, so as to surprise my companions when they got up. For about a quarter

of an hour I traversed tracts of heath which reminded me of my native country, when a too confiding rabbit came frisking along within gunshot, which I knocked over and placed in my game-bag.

On my return all were up, standing round the fire, and[149] they hailed me as a conqueror. The terrible trials of the day before seemed to be entirely forgotten; even Lucien had recovered all his liveliness. L'Encuerado took the rabbit, and in an incredible short space of time had it skinned, and placed to broil on the burning coals.

"Well! what do you think of hurricanes?" asked Sumichrast of Lucien, who was watching him cleaning his gun.

"They are most awful! I should never have thought that the wind, which is invisible, could have blown down and broken up trees as big as that one which almost fell upon us."

"Were you much frightened?"

"Rather; and so were you, for you were quite pale."

"The danger was much greater than you imagined. If the uprooted tree had pitched on our rock, it would have upset it, and crushed us beneath."

"Then the wind must be much stronger in forests than in towns?"

"No; for the hurricane of yesterday probably destroyed entire villages. It was one of those tropical storms which happily only break out at long intervals. Many an Indian is at this moment rebuilding his destroyed hut."

Lucien looked very thoughtful, and went and sat down at the foot of a tree. When I passed near him, I saw he had tears in his eyes.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I was thinking of mamma and my brothers. M. Sumichrast told me that the tempest must have demolished whole villages; so perhaps our home has met with some misfortune."

"Don't be frightened, my dear boy! Thank God! stone walls can generally stand against wind. Besides, this hurricane can hardly have been felt at Orizava. At all events, your mamma has more reason to be anxious about *us*, for[150] she knows that we are far from shelter—exposed to all its violence."

I kissed poor Lucien, and comforted him as well as I could, assisted by l'Encuerado, who soon afterwards took him off to look after our roast rabbit.

The *tochtli*, or Mexican rabbit, is different from the European species, although it has the same colored coat and instincts. In fact it is a hare.

"Do you know the family of the animal we are going to have for breakfast?" asked Sumichrast.

"Yes; it is a Rodent."