Front of Church of San Francisco, City of Mexico

THE LAND OF THE SUN

VISTAS MEXICANAS

BY CHRISTIAN REID

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER

LIST OF ILLUSTEATIONS.

THE LAND OF THE SUN.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.

A Plan of Campaign.

“Here is another letter from Philip urging us to spend a few months in Mexico this winter," said General Meynell, entering his domestic circle with an open epistle in his hand.

The domestic circle, which consisted of two ladies — one a graceful young woman in widow's mourning, the other a pretty, fair-haired girl — received this announcement with interest.

“Poor Phil!" said the first, holding out a slim white hand for the letter. "He is very lonely, I am sure. I think you had better decide to go, papa. We all want to see him as much as he wishes to see us."

"I am not sure about Phil being lonely," said the girl. "He is so social that he would fraternize with an Apache Indian if there was nobody else available for the purpose. But I should certainly like to see the dear boy, and I should also like exceedingly to see Mexico. So, my vote is for going. And last week, papa, you said that you thought you would go."

"Well," said her father, smiling into the bright, upturned face, "I am still somewhat of that opinion; and I have come in to talk it over. Let us hear what Margaret says."

But Margaret, otherwise Mrs. Langdon, was absorbed in the letter which she held. "What a boy!" she said presently as she laid it down. "I really think we must go and look after him, or else he may fall into mischief. He is just at the impressionable age, and I don’t like this talk about Mexican beauties."

“Why, a moment ago I thought you were sure he was lonely," said Dorothea mischievously. "I told you Phil would never be *that*. Now, I don't believe there is any more danger from Mexican beauties than from loneliness. It in your shy, reserved man who falls in love— not a gay, pleasure-loving fellow like Phil.”

"We bow to your superior knowledge," said her sister smiling; “but still I think that even to Phil, if he is too much cut off from his family, danger may come. And 1 distinctly should not like him to marry a Mexican.”

"Nor should I,” said the general— who had a high opinion of his elder daughter's judgment, and was also full of old-fashioned prejudices. “If there is any danger of that kind, we had better start at once. But it did not strike me that anything he says in the letter points that way."

“Not exactly," said Mrs. Langdon. "He only speaks of these pleasant acquaintances he has made, and declares that one young lady — what is her name?" (consulting the letter) — "Ah! Doña Mercedes — is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Now, I agree with Dorothea that he is not specially susceptible; but there might be danger for any young man in contact with the most beautiful woman he has ever seen."

"I will not go so far as to assert that he is positively danger-proof," observed Dorothea. “In fact I am prepared to admit that he is desperately in love, and on the point of marriage, if it will induce you and papa to decide that we are to go to Mexico."

"I have already decided that I should like very much to go," said Mrs. Langdon. "The matter rests with papa. If he cares for the journey—"

But the general would have undertaken a journey into Thibet for the sake of his favourite son. "Yes," he said, “I think I shall like it very much— or if not like it exactly, you know, at least not find it disagreeable. Besides seeing Phil, which is of course the chief inducement, we shall see a country new to all of us, and will discover if there is any danger for the boy."

"I have an idea!" cried Dorothea quickly. "Listen! Discovering if Phil is in danger will do no good, unless we provide a remedy in case the danger exists. Now, Margaret and myself are very charming, no one is more thoroughly aware of the fact than I am; but I fear that, since we are unfortunately his sisters, our charms would not suffice to draw him from those of Doña Mercedes. So, in order to be provided for any emergency, we must take with us an attraction sufficient for the purpose."

"What do you possibly mean?" asked her sister.

“I mean," she answered impressively, "Violet Graham. Phil was in love with her before he went away, but she provoked him by her coquetry, and he confided to me that he would never think of her again. But that is all nonsense, you know. Of course he will think of her again as soon as he sees her; for she certainly is wonderfully pretty. And so we must take her along."

"Your schemes are as absurd as yourself," observed Mrs. Langdon, “and yet — perhaps — I cannot say that I like Violet Graham very much," she concluded, rather irrelevantly.

"Neither do I," said Dorothea frankly. “But what does that matter, provided she serves the purpose of saving Phil? She will not marry him, because he is not rich enough; and he will not break his heart about her, because he knows her too well. But I am sure there is no Mexican girl living who can hold her own against Violet Graham, and if you want to make an end of the Doña Mercedes affair, you had better take her along."

"But is it likely that she will wish to be taken?" asked Mrs. Langdon — while the general listened to these rapid plans with an air of partial stupefaction.

"She told me only yesterday that she is bored to death, that society is very dull this winter, and that she is much in need of a change, so my opinion is that she will eagerly embrace the idea," responded Dorothea.

“It strikes me as rather a dangerous remedy for a disease which after all may only exist in our fancies," said Mrs. Langdon meditatively. She took up the letter again and read aloud the following passage:

“I do not think I have told you before of my good luck in making the acquaintance of one of the most aristocratic families of this part of Mexico. They are of Spanish descent — going straight back to one of the Conquistadors and all that sort of thing — have immense estates and are generally of the exclusive class that foreigners seldom reach, especially a poor devil of a civil engineer like myself. But it was necessary to run the survey for our proposed line through the hacienda of Señor Don Rafael de Vargas. Considering that it is almost thirty miles square, he would probably never have known of our presence on it; hut I judged it best to set matters straight with the lord of the soil. So, being in charge of the party, I called at the *casa grande* and

fortunately found Don Rafael himself in occupation, for it is only a certain number of weeks in the year that these *grand seigneurs* live on their great estates. He received me with a courtesy altogether Mexican, and a hospitality more than Arabian. He is a splendid old fellow in every way, and I was only too happy to accept his invitation to be presented to his family. Such a family! Their number is legion; for besides his wife and children, all his sisters, his cousins, and his aunts, not to speak of many of his friends, appear to live under his roof. Altogether, the household, when I was presented to it in assembled force, consisted of more than twenty persons; and 1 was informed that several of its members were absent — notably two sons of my host, whom I have since met, and who are fine fellows and quite men of the world, having had all possible advantages of education and travel. But one person was *not* absent on my first introduction — and that was the youngest daughter of the house, the most beautiful creature that it has ever been my good fortune to see. I wish that I could describe her to you — but that is impossible. Fancy everything most entrancing in Spanish beauty, and you have Doña Mercedes, for that is her charming name. I have been frequently to the hacienda since that occasion, and I now count the De Vargas family amongst my best friends, which is rare good luck I assure you for a “gringo" like myself.' "

"Now that is all," said Mrs. Langdon, looking up from the letter, "and probably there is nothing in it that ought to excite our apprehensions. Still, a young man is made of inflammable material, and his admiration for everything most entrancing in Spanish beauty may lead to results that none of us desire."

"It will be safer to take Violet with us," said Dorothea. “She can do no harm, and she may be of use. By the time we reach Phil he may be bound hand and foot by the charms of this Mexican beauty; and we may need a counter-attraction without delay. And where are we to find it if we do not, like wise people, provide it beforehand?"

Mrs. Langdon looked at her father with a smile. "Does all this seem absurd to you, papa?" she asked. "Are you prepared to burden yourself with another young woman because Dorothea thinks that she may be useful in drawing Phil away from Mexican snares?"

The general pulled his grey moustaches meditatively for a moment before he answered. “Well, my dear," he said, “I do not suppose another young woman will add much to my trouble; and if you and Dorothea think she might be of use in the manner indicated, let us by all means take her along."

“If she will consent to go, which I very much doubt," remarked Mrs. Langdon. “And really I cannot say that I enjoy the idea of adding a girl like Violet Graham, with not an idea beyond social amusement, to our party. If we go to Mexico, I, for one, want to see the country in a satisfactory manner; and she will be bored to death and bore us to death in the process."

“There is a way to avoid that," said Dorothea. "Take a man or two along."

"Dorothea!" cried her sister indignantly. “If your suggestions are heeded we shall soon be of the size and compatibility of a party of Cook's tourists."

"Oh, no!" answered Dorothea, quite undismayed. "One or two men will be enough, and will not make the party of an unmanageable size. The trouble is to find the right kind of men — good travellers, and also cultivated, sympathetic, and agreeable people."

"A modest list of requirements. Do you know any such people who are likely to be ready to start at a moment’s notice for Mexico?"

“I cannot just now think of any one who exactly answers to the description; but I have no doubt 1 shall after a little reflection."

The general at this juncture began to look grave. The project which had opened with such modest dimensions — the journey of a family party to Mexico. to visit the son and brother, with a little sight-seeing thrown in — now, under Dorothea's manipulation, enlarged rapidly and alarmingly into a possible excursion of a magnitude calculated to dismay; and the more so because the general knew well that the thing upon which his youngest daughter set her pretty, wilful head was almost invariably the thing which came to pass. The addition of the young lady described by Mrs. Langdon as not possessing an idea beyond social amusement had not troubled him — because, in the first place, all girls seemed to him much alike, and, in the second place, he knew that her presence would not greatly concern him. But if men were to be added to the party, they *did* concern him. How many hours he should have to spend with them, and how necessary it was that for such an expedition they should be irreproachable in character, conduct, and temper — especially temper! The general shook his head as he endeavoured to gaze severely at his volatile daughter.

"My dear," he observed, "you must remember that 1 have a word to say in this matter. I really do not see the necessity of adding any more members to our party, but if —ahem! you think one or two men might make things pleasanter, I must at least know who they are before they are invited to join us. I should be very sorry to be obliged to pass a month or so in the constant society of some of the very shallow young men whom one meets in these days."

“Papa," said Dorothea severely, “what have you ever seen in me to lead you to imagine that I should dream of wanting any man of the class to which you allude? Ask Margaret if I like them, or if they like me. I thought you knew me better, and had a higher opinion of my taste and judgment."

The general looked as one thus rebuked should look; but he replied: "It strikes me, that I have on a few occasions seen such young men at my own dinner-table — and I am very sure that J did not invite them there."

"One must take society as one finds it," said Dorothea loftily; "and if one shuts one's doors on all people who are not cultivated and charming, one would have a very small circle. One must ask stupid people to dinner sometimes — but not to go to Mexico with one. When I do that, papa, you may put me in a strait-jacket, for I should be a fit subject for it. The trouble is, as I have said, to find anybody worthy of such an invitation."

"You may be quite sure, papa," said Mrs. Langdon, "that no one will be added to the party without your knowledge and consent."

"After all," observed the general thoughtfully, "it is not, perhaps, a bad idea to enlarge the masculine element a little. I should not object to a man if he were of suitable age and tastes, for my companionship. I am going down to the club, and perhaps I may meet—"

"Papa," cried Dorothea, springing up and seizing him by the button-hole, "don't you dare to do such a thing as to ask any of the old fo— gentlemen who hobnob with you at the club, to join us I If you do, I shall stay at home. A bore fastened to one for such a length of time would be simply intolerable. "

"Softly, softly, Dorothea," said her sister's quiet tones. "Papa is not nearly as likely as you are to do anything rash; but perhaps " — looking at him with a beguiling smile — "he would not mind promising not to invite any one without consulting us?"

"I should not think of such a thing," responded the general a little gruffly. "I am far too much under petticoat rule to venture on such an independent action. Now Dorothea, if you will be kind enough to let me go—"

"Not until you forgive my impetuosity, papa." said Dorothea, who saw that he was for once displeased. "The danger was so great it upset me for a moment. Come— nobody at all shall be asked, and we will go as a strictly family party if you prefer it."

"I prefer what will give you most pleasure, my dear," said her father kindly. "You and Margaret can talk it over and decide whom you would like to ask. I only request a reasonable privilege of veto— which probably 1 shall have no need to exercise. Now you must really let me go. 1 have an appointment to meet a man at the club at four o'clock."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER II.

GATHERING RECRUITS.

Dorothea always afterwards said that it was a positive proof to her of the direct interposition of a kindly Providence in even the small affairs of human life, that when her father entered his club that afternoon the first person whom he met was Herbert Russell.

An old friend in former days of the Meynell family, this gentleman in later times had become somewhat lost to them — but very well known to the world at large as traveller, scholar, and man of letters. A wanderer in many lands, he had in great measure ceased to belong to one, at least as far as the subtle chords of association and friendship were concerned; and, as there is no gain without some loss, he sometimes felt that the man who takes the whole world for his country, must of necessity miss some things which belong to a narrower mode of existence. His knowledge may be much greater, his human sympathies far more wide, but he can never know the long-enduring ties, the deeply-rooted friendships, the tender if half-unconscious affection for familiar paths and skies, which form so much of life for the man whose ways have lain within closer bounds. Russell was a man whose perceptions were too fine not to feel this; and it sometimes came upon him with saddening force when he found himself treading as a stranger the streets of his native city. He had friends there who never forgot him, or who at least remembered him with a cordial welcome whenever he presented himself to them. But to how many interests of their lives had his long absences made him alien; while at every recurring visit he found their number less! He was thinking of these things as he sat— a spare, sunburnt man, with nothing remarkable about his appearance except an air of refinement and a pair of very keen and kindly dark eves — in the reading-room of the club with a newspaper in his hand. Of the half-dozen men present not one was known to him; and although nobody was ever more absolutely without that social craving which makes their own society so oppressive to

many people, the fact added to that consciousness of strangeness which always saddened him a little. His eyes were on the sheet before him, but he was paying not much heed to its words, rather wandering back in fancy to half-forgotten days and scenes, when a hand suddenly fell on his shoulder, and looking up he saw a tall, erect, elderly gentleman with something of a military air, a white moustache and grey, closely curling hair, who was smiling with eager cordiality.

"Why, Russell, my dear fellow," cried this striking-looking personage, "where do you come from? and how long have you been in New Orleans?"

"My dear General Meynell, I am delighted to meet you!" said Russell, rising quickly and grasping the other's out-stretched hand. "I come — well, let us say, for the sake of brevity, from the antipodes, and 1 have only been in New Orleans a day or two. I should have given myself the pleasure of calling on you at once, had I known you were in the city."

"Oh! I am always here now," answered the general cheerily. "Come, let us find a quiet corner where we can talk and smoke a sociable cigar. What was I saying?" he went on when they were settled in the smoking-room. "Ah, yes! — that I live here now. I have given up the management of the plantation to George since he has married. Life on a plantation is no bed of roses in these days; and I much prefer taking my ease in New Orleans, where I can meet my old friends, and enjoy a few rubbers and dinners occasionally."

"Your friends have reason to congratulate themselves, as well as you, on the change," said Russell. "But I shall never forget the delightful days I have spent at Beau-Séjour. And how are my old friends, who were very young friends in those days, Miss Meynell — Mrs. Langdon, I mean — and Mademoiselle Dorothea?"

"They are both very well. Margaret, you know, is a widow. Her husband, poor fellow! died before they had been married a year. Dorothea, who was a school-girl when you saw her last, is now a full-fledged young lady — but as much of a madcap as ever."

"A charming madcap, I am sure, or else the promise of her youth has been belied. How well I remember her — the quaint, wise, merry little hoyden! And Phil — what is he doing?"

"Phil insisted on becoming a civil engineer — chiefly, I think, because the boy has a passion for roving; and he thought that profession a good means of gratifying his taste. He has gone to Mexico. By-the-bye, we are thinking of going down there to see him this winter. I wonder if you know anything about that country — you are what they call in these days a 'globe-trotter,' eh?"

"I must plead guilty to having done a little globe-trotting," answered Russell, modestly, "and as for Mexico, I know it well and like it so much that I am on my way there to spend my third winter."

"What!" cried the general, with a radiant face. "You are on your way to Mexico? Why, this is capital news! How pleased Margaret and Dorothea will be! You are just the man to tell them all about the country, for we know what kind of a traveller you are. It was only the other day Dorothea was talking of some of your articles about— Persia, I believe. If you can throw as much light for us on Mexico now —"

"I ought to be able to throw a good deal more," said Russell, "for I have seen little of Persia, compared to what I have seen of Mexico. I wandered down there, as it were, by accident two years ago, and was so pleased with all I found that I returned last winter, and am on my way for a third visit now. I have been studying the country, especially its history, art, and antiquities,

with the intention of writing something which I hope may have a scholarly value, and I shall be very glad if I can be of service in giving you any information."

"You can tell us everything!" said the general. “What a stroke of good luck that I should meet you! Phil is very much pleased with the country; but Phil is of an age and disposition to be pleased with anything — so I have not attached much importance to his opinion. But if you like it — and you really do, eh?”

"I like it so much,” Russell answered, "that I am half afraid to talk of it, for fear of seeming enthusiastic — a fault not readily pardoned. But the land, with its story, its art, and its people, is one of the most interesting to be found in the world to-day. It is Spain, the East, and the New World blended in a whole of incomparable picturesqueness."

"Is it possible?" said the general. "1 have read a good many books of travel professing to describe the country, but the impression they left of it on my mind was by no means of that kind."

Russell smiled. “The American traveller "of a generation ago," he said, "found nothing to admire and everything to condemn in Mexico, because everything was moulded in a form of civilisation entirely different from his own — which he conceived to be the standard of excellence for the world. It cannot be said that this race of travellers is extinct at the present time; but another class has, happily, risen amongst us, whom cosmopolitan culture has educated into broader sympathy and a love of things foreign and picturesque. To these people Mexico offers a field for delightful wandering which is simply unsurpassed."

"When Dorothea hears you," said the general, "there will be no restraining her. She will want to start at once. But I am really very glad that you can promise us an interesting excursion."

“More than that," said Russell, "I advise you not to defer it, for it is well to see Mexico before the change which is called 'progress' goes farther. With railroads piercing the country in every direction, the tide of travel constantly increasing, and money-making Americans and Englishmen flooding it, the assimilating process which is making the whole world so drearily alike will soon have done its work there as elsewhere. Go, then, and see it while its peculiar and picturesque charm remains."

“Well, you know I don't agree with you about practical improvements and so on," answered the general, who thought it his duty to enter a protest now and then in favour of the nineteenth century, as represented by railroads, street-cars, steam-ploughs, and other things which his friend regarded as industrial atrocities. "But no doubt we shall find Mexico interesting — all the more because we can enter it in a railroad train. Now, you must really come and see Margaret and Dorothea, and tell them all that you have been telling me. They will be delighted to see you again. Have you any engagement? Can't you come at once?"

Russell had no engagement, and there seemed no reason why he should not oblige his old friend in the manner asked. So he cheerfully assented to the general's proposal, and accompanied him from the club and into a St. Charles Avenue car. A little later they alighted on the handsome street of that name before a large house, encircled by wide galleries, which occupied a corner situation, and was surrounded by fine old trees and beautiful lawns and shrubbery.

“I hope we shall find my daughters at home," said the general, as he admitted his companion and himself. The hope was speedily realized; for, crossing the veranda and entering a

spacious hall, the sound of voices from the open drawing-room door told them that the ladies were within. The next moment they stood in the doorway and looked on a pretty picture.

A fire which was a mass of glowing coal burned in a brass-girt, tile-lined grate, and threw its rosy radiance over a room full of the soft hangings and graceful forms which gratify the artistic sense in these aesthetic days, and also over a group gathered in easy chairs about the hearth, while the short winter afternoon deepened into dusk outside the windows. The lady clad in black draperies, with a transparent complexion, rich chestnut hair waving back from a beautiful brow, radiant grey eyes, and a smile of singular sweetness, was, of course, Mrs. Langdon. There was no mistaking her, though Russell had seen her last just as she had bloomed into girlhood and was on the eve of the marriage which had ended so soon. Neither could he mistake pretty Dorothea, with her fair hair, and soft brown eyes set in a Greuze-like face. But it was not until he had advanced into the room, been presented to and cordially welcomed by the two ladies, that he recognised the slender, well-dressed man who formed the third person of the group. Yet he, too, proved to be an old acquaintance. Leon Travers was, as his name implied, a product of the two strains of nationality that meet in Louisiana, and do not very often mingle. The marriages of two successive generations had made him in blood more English than French. Yet so strong is the impress of race, especially of a race so marked in its characteristics as that of the creole of Louisiana, that he looked as if no one of his ancestors had ever sought an alliance outside of the French quarter of New Orleans. His graceful figure and dark, thin, handsome face were as strikingly French as his manner and speech were English. And in his mental constitution the same subtle mingling and predominance of the Gallic type appeared. In his processes of thought he was altogether French, keen, logical, brilliant, with an intellectual facility which had made his friends early prophesy much distinction for him. But the distinction had not been achieved, except in a limited social sense; for, with all his brilliancy, the critical faculty overpowered every other with him, and did not spare himself more than others. Consequently, what he might do remained yet in the order of potentialities, while the fact that he had never done anything to justify his reputation for cleverness, together with his attitude of unfailing criticism, made some people who disliked him declare that he was not only overrated, but full of objectionable conceit and affectation. But those who knew him best were sure that this was not the case; and amongst those who knew him best were the Meynells. It was true that Dorothea was amongst the number of his most unsparing critics; but this probably was because she resented a slight tinge of patronage in his manner towards herself — the patronage which many men of the world display to young girls, and which is peculiarly irritating to a girl who feels or fancies herself clever enough to meet the same man of the world on equal terms.

The first greetings and inquiries of this group of old friends over, and the situation as it related to Mexico fully explained, Dorothea's enthusiasm fully justified her father's prediction.

“You are on your way to Mexico for your third winter!" she said to Russell. "How fortunate that papa should have met you just at this time! for I suppose he has told you that we have decided to go there ourselves?"

"He has told me," Russell answered, "and I was delighted to hear it, for I am sure that you will be charmed with Mexico. Anyone of taste and culture must be charmed with it. And then, you see, a little selfishness comes in — for, since I am going there myself, what is to prevent our paths from crossing now and then?"

“Oh I I hope they will do more than cross," returned the young lady quickly. She clasped her hands and leaned forward in a pretty attitude of entreaty. "Mr. Russell," she said quite solemnly, "we cannot have the presumption to ask you to join *us*, but I am sure papa and Margaret will agree with me in begging that we may be allowed the privilege of joining *you*. Just think" — addressing her father and sister — “what a guide and interpreter of the country Fate has thrown in our way!"

"But you forget," said Mrs. Langdon, “that however admirable such an arrangement might be for us, Mr. Russell has probably other things to do besides interpreting the country for our benefit."

"I have nothing to do which is incompatible with rendering you any service in my power," said Russell — who really meant what he said; for, although esteemed an unsocial man generally, he was by no means averse to society when it suited him. "My only claim to know a little more of Mexico than most travellers," he went on, "is that I like the country and the people— and there is no comprehension equal to that which is founded on sympathy. I think, therefore, that I may be of use to you; and if so, I assure you that I shall be very happy."

“And you are willing to take charge of us, and tell us where to go, and what to see, and how to see it?— you will not be bored by having to go over ground that you know so well?" asked Dorothea eagerly.

He shook his head smiling. “I shall not be bored,'" he said; “but I cannot answer for what you may be, for remember that a man with a hobby is likely to ride it hard. And Mexico is my hobby just now."

“That makes it the more delightful,” she said with shining eyes. “If you did not take an interest in the country, how could you interpret it? And 1 must tell you, Mr. Russell, that you are my ideal traveller. I have never read any of your articles about foreign places without saying to myself that I should like to look at a country through your eyes —for you see so much that seems to be hidden from other people. And now I am to have the opportunity! It is almost too fortunate to be true."

“I hope," said Russell, "that you may not change your mind with regard to my ideal travelling qualities, and decide that hereafter you prefer to receive my impressions through the medium of type. But"— and now he included the others in his speech—“if you are leaving soon, I shall be glad to join you and give you the benefit of my experience in every way possible."

"My dear fellow," said the general cordially, "Dorothea has spoken the sentiments of all of us. We shall be very grateful if you will allow us to attach ourselves to you; for, apart from your personal qualities, your knowledge of the country will be of the greatest advantage."

"And, as Dorothea has also said, it is wonderful good fortune for us to have met you just on the eve of our journey," added Mrs. Langdon with her charming smile.

Then Travers, who up to this time had been listening silently, suddenly spoke.

"I wonder," he said in his slightly languid voice, "if your party has room for another recruit I, too, am smitten by a desire to see Mexico, and to enjoy the benefit of Russell's interpretation thereof. Perhaps I am exposing myself to be ignominiously snubbed; but I think I should like to have a part in anything so pleasant as this expedition promises to be."

It is probable that the speaker was not flattered by the pause which followed this speech — a pause in which the members of the Meynell family looked at each other, and, mindful of the

agreement entered into between them, tried to read in each other's eyes the sentiments of each regarding the proposed addition to their party. Before any one felt certain enough to break the rather awkward silence, Travers himself spoke again with a smile.

"I see," he said, “that I have been indiscreet. Pray consider the suggestion withdrawn — or perhaps it is I who should withdraw and allow my name to be balloted upon?"

“No, no!" said the general quickly, "I have no doubt we shall all be glad for you to join us. You see," he added frankly, "we made an arrangement that no one should be asked to go without the consent of all concerned; and so—"

"And so nobody wished to take the responsibility of speaking for all," said Mrs. Langdon. “But, like papa, I shall be very glad if you will join us."

“There only remains, then, for me to gain the votes of Miss Meynell and Russell," said he, turning to the persons indicated.

"Mine you have with hearty goodwill," said Russell, who had always liked the young man, and knew him to possess capabilities of comradeship which were not common.

But Dorothea held her peace for a minute longer, regarding him the while with something slightly defiant in her bright, steadfast glance. They were always sparring, these two, but no one believed that there was any real dislike between them; so Dorothea's present silence rather surprised her father and sister. When she spoke at last it was with a judicial air.

"t is not possible always to consult one's own tastes and wishes," she said. "In forming a party like this one should consider, in the first place, if its different elements will agree harmoniously. Frankly, Mr. Travers, I have my doubts concerning the harmony between yourself and — some other members.”

"Meaning, I presume, yourself,” replied he calmly. "But, as far as I am concerned, I am willing to enter into an engagement to keep the peace under all circumstances. If you on your part promise to be amiable—”

"I was not alluding to myself at all,” interrupted Miss Meynell. “I was thinking of an altogether different person. You have not heard that our party will include Miss Graham.”

"What!" he cried, startled out of his usual languor. "Violet Graham?" — Dorothea nodded—"Why on earth have you asked *her*?"

“Because I have a liking for her society." responded Dorothea unblushingly. “I am aware that you do not share this liking, but you see —”

“I was not taken into consideration," he said as she paused. “That is very true. So, the question now is " he pulled his moustaches meditatively for a moment — "is Miss Graham enough of a drawback to spoil Mexico and what promises to be otherwise an exceptionally agreeable party? There must always be a drawback to everything human. Bearing this in mind, I still propose myself as a recruit. After all, if the rest of you can stand the fair Violet, I can. But I really think Russell ought to be warned."

“There is nothing at all for you to be warned about, Mr. Russell," said Dorothea with a spark of indignation in her glance. "Miss Graham, who has agreed to accompany us to Mexico, is a very beautiful, and, most people think, very charming girl, who, however, has been unfortunate enough to incur Mr. Travers’s dislike — why, I am really unable to say."

“Then allow me to say," remarked Mr. Travers with great urbanity, "I dislike, or rather I disapprove, of Miss Graham because she is a heartless flirt, without distinction either of manners

or of mind, although she possesses an exceedingly pretty face. I thought Russell should be warned, because she will certainly attempt his capture at once."

An old aqueduct, Zacatecas

Russell smiled. "If such an attempt will amuse her," he said, "by all means let her have the gratification. Nothing is less likely than her success."

“Yes, there is one thing less likely, Mr. Russell — and that is her making the attempt," cried Dorothea, growing more angry. "Mr. Travers forgets himself when he says such things."

Travers deliberately drew from his pocket a note-book and pencil. "Are you willing," he inquired, “to make a bet—any stake you please— that the event predicted does not occur before your Mexican journey is half over? I will give heavy odds, for I know Miss Graham."

"I should never think of making a bet on such a subject," replied Dorothea with dignity. "I am only quite certain, as I remarked a moment ago, that no party which is not entirely harmonious in its different elements can prove a success. Mr. Russell, I believe you have not seen Phil in a long while. Come and I will show you his likeness."

As Russell rose and followed the young lady across the room, Travers turned to Mrs. Langdon with an air of appeal.

“What am I to do?" he asked. "Am I to give up the hope of making one of your party, or can I venture to go in spite of Miss Graham's presence and Miss Dorothea's disapproval?"

"I don't think Dorothea will prove implacable," answered her sister. "But why do you take so much pleasure in provoking her, and why do you dislike Violet Graham so much?"

"I dislike Miss Graham because she rasps me in every way," he replied, ignoring the first question. "Believe me, it is really a mistake to make her one of your party."

"I am inclined to think so too," Mrs. Langdon admitted candidly. “But Dorothea has a plan — and there is no escape now, for Violet came in half an hour ago, was asked to go, and has agreed to do so. So, under the circumstances, perhaps you had better not go. I fear you would not find it pleasant."

"If I had a proper sense of my own dignity I should retire at once," he said. “But I suppose it is owing to the contrariety inherent in human nature that because nobody seems to want me, I want very much to go. I'll risk Miss Graham and all her arts, not to speak of the disapproval of Miss Meynell, if you will allow me to join your party.”

She looked at him, smiling kindly. Those who knew her well said that Margaret Langdon had a singular faculty of not only divining the best in people, but of drawing it out. Certainly Travers was a different man when he talked to her from what he was in general society, or what he was when he was provoking Dorothea. His affectations, of which he certainly had a few, fell away from him; his criticisms had not so sharp an edge, and he spoke out his inner thoughts with a sincerity and a certainty of comprehension which he hardly displayed with any other person. In this, as in many another case, “*Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner*,” and Mrs. Langdon, reading him thoroughly, not only pardoned his foibles, but liked him cordially, as her next words proved.

"Come, by all means,*' she said. "Never mind Dorothea; and as for Violet Graham, I am sure you don't really mind her. Now that we have Mr. Russell, I think our expedition will be worth joining."

“I’m certain of it," said Travers; “and since you kindly permit me, I shall brave all consequences and go."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER III.

BY THE SUNSET ROUTE.

If Miss Graham embodied the consequences which Mr. Travers so valiantly made up his mind to brave, they were certainly, Russell decided when he saw the young lady, of a very agreeable order, to the outward view at least. She was indeed possessed of beauty in uncommon degree, and when to a face of singular fairness, with violet eyes under lashes and brows of midnight darkness, is added a tall, graceful figure dressed in that perfection of style which it requires all of a woman's mind and a very long purse besides to compass, it will be perceived that report was not likely to do Miss Graham injustice when it credited her with a remarkable destructive capacity where the hearts and peace of the masculine half of humanity were concerned. Indeed, as Margaret Langdon began to reflect, it seemed rather hard that poor Philip Meynell, after having once escaped from the net of such a charmer, should have it cast over him again. But the thought of a Mexican sister-in-law steeled her heart, and she decided that the

possible cruelty was justified by necessity, and that after all many worse things might befall a young man than a hopeless passion for Violet Graham.

What caprice possessed this young lady to forsake her field of social conquest for a tour in Mexico, no one was able to declare with certainty; but Dorothea suspected that an engagement of which she had tired, and which she had ended abruptly, was one reason for her desiring a change of scene, coupled with the fact that an irate father had for a time refused supplies for new toilettes. To these important reasons might be added the lesser one of wishing to reclaim and fitly punish Philip Meynell, who had precipitately and somewhat indignantly renounced his allegiance. When she heard, moreover, that Travers was to form one of the party, Miss Graham smiled in a peculiar manner — a smile which might be translated to mean, "Now has mine enemy been delivered into my hand" — and when Russell, of whose reputation she was not ignorant, was presented to her, she felt that the possible hardships and boredom of the expedition had been provided with compensations.

It was, therefore, a party sufficiently well satisfied with themselves and with each other for practical purposes of harmony which assembled one day in the station of the Southern Pacific, bound for the land of sunshine. And very desirable such a land seemed on this special day, for the sky was overcast, and a cold, raw air from the great river made them shiver under their wrappings. There are times when this mighty water seems to bring the very breath of the icy North upon its flood, and when the climate of the most delightful city of America suffers in consequence.

"I am glad that it is a disagreeable day," said Dorothea. "When one is going in search of climate, one wishes the contrast with what one has left to be as effective as possible. I think I have understood you to say, Mr. Russell, that there is always fine weather in Mexico?"

"I shall make no more promises or prophecies about Mexico," answered Russell smiling. "You will soon be able to judge of it for yourself. But I am safe in saying that you will not feel such an air as this soon again. Mexico has no Mississippi to bring the air of the arctics into the tropics."

"I have but one complaint to make against you as leader of this expedition, Mr. Russell," observed Miss Graham, when they were seated in the cabin of the ferry-boat. "Why have we not taken the Montezuma Special? Some of my friends went to Mexico in it last winter, and they were delighted with the ease and comfort of the journey."

"Your friends, no doubt, travelled direct to the City of Mexico," Russell answered, "and therefore the train of which you speak answered admirably for them. But for us it would not do, because our plan of travel would require us to leave it very soon. We intend, you know, to proceed leisurely southward, stopping at all points of interest on the way."

"Oh!" said Miss Graham. Her face fell perceptibly. Evidently this plan of travel did not commend itself very much to her. "I thought," she said after a moment, "that we were going immediately to the City of Mexico, and that afterward, perhaps, we would do a little sight-seeing in other places — although Elise Delemaine told me that there was really little else worth seeing."

Perhaps it was Travers's smile which made Dorothea's voice a trifle sharp as she said quickly: "I am sure, Violet, I told you distinctly that we were going to see Mexico as completely as possible; and by Mexico I meant the country, not merely the capital."

"Did you, dear?" responded Miss Graham, in a tone of resignation. “I suppose I was stupid and did not understand. And then I really did not imagine there was anything to see in the country."

"It is a pity you did not explain a little more fully to Miss Graham what she was committing herself to," Travers observed to Dorothea. "If she had been aware of the exhaustive, and probably also exhausting, nature of your itinerary, she might have preferred to remain at home."

Miss Graham lifted her dark lashes and looked at the speaker with her expressive eyes for a moment before replying. Then she said sweetly: "Oh, no! I should not have remained at home, because I should have thought that nothing could prove very disagreeable with such a party as we have; and, after all, though things are very well, *people* are the chief consideration— don't you think so?"

What Mr. Travers thought was inaudible, for at this moment the ferry-boat touched the western shore of the river, and there was an instantaneous movement of the throng of passengers forward.

If the train which awaited them was not the special and luxurious one to which Miss Graham had alluded, it was of sufficient comfort to satisfy all except the most spoiled travellers of a generation spoiled by the unlimited luxury born of unlimited wealth. Their sections in the Pullman were taken, and they had nothing to do but settle themselves for the first stretch of their long journey.

But now that this journey had absolutely commenced, and they were irrevocably committed to each other's society for an indefinite length of time, the gravity of the situation seemed to make itself felt to two persons at least. One was Dorothea, who moving away with a slight air of impatience from the section in which Miss Graham established herself with her multitude of wraps and bags, sat down alone in another, and turned her face resolutely toward the window. Her sister smiled at the expression of the back of her head— if the back of a head can properly be said to have expression. She knew perfectly well what the young lady was thinking, what doubts of her own wisdom were assailing her, what sincere regret for the weight with which she had encumbered the party. But Dorothea's moods of contrition, though keen, were generally short. Mrs. Langdon knew that her spirits would quickly rebound from their fit of dejection, and her high opinion of her own judgment reassert itself with its accustomed buoyancy. She made no attempt at consolation, therefore, but occupied herself directing the disposition of the various impedimenta of the party — while General Meynell found an acquaintance with whom he opened brisk conversation; and Travers, taking out a cigar-case, lifted his eyebrows to Russell, who followed him to the smoking compartment.

Then it became apparent that another person beside Dorothea was oppressed with a sense of the irrevocable. There was no one beside themselves in the compartment, and, after blowing out a fragrant cloud of smoke, Travers proceeded to unburden his mind.

“I don't know how it strikes you," he observed in a confidential tone to his companion, "but I begin to feel that we have embarked upon a risky undertaking. I have always had a distinct horror of the close association of travel with uncongenial persons, and therefore I have always declined to join any party formed for such a purpose. Yet behold me at last, not only one of a

party bound together for weeks to come, but a party which comprises two people who dislike me sincerely, and one of whom irritates my nerves beyond measure."

"Don't you think it is rather a mistake to allow your nerves to be irritated?" Russell asked. "I grant that, as a rule, travelling-parties are undesirable — I have always avoided them myself — but I have a strong hope that our present party may prove an exception to the general rule. Moreover, we have not entered into articles of partnership, and should association prove disagreeable, nothing is easier than to separate."

"One would dislike to take that step, on account of the old general and Mrs. Langdon," said Travers. "I have the sincerest regard for both of them. No" — as he caught a slight smile on Russell's lip — "don't start out with any mistaken ideas in your head. I am not in love with Mrs. Langdon. I think her the most charming, sympathetic, and high-minded woman I know; but I have not the presumption to do more than admire her from afar."

"Yet in the old days at Beau-Sejour I sometimes thought—" Russell suggested.

"What was quite correct," assented the other. "In those days I was tremendously in love with her. But she never gave me a thought; and I had sense enough to see it. She married Langdon, and then — well, I did not see her for some time, and when I did I found that she was another woman and I another man. We are the best of friends, and I admire her, as I have said, more than any one I know. But that is all. So don't imagine that any promptings of the tender passion have made me embark on a journey which I fear will prove a mistake as far as I am concerned."

"Nonsense!" said Russell, who saw that these first symptoms of dissatisfaction must be promptly quelled. "Do you think we are the kind of people to be on non-speaking terms by the end of the week, in the fashion of some parties I have encountered? Are we not a trifle too well-bred — and too much of philosophers also, for that? If Miss Graham jars on you, can you not ignore her, or, better yet, amuse yourself by studying her as a typical product of certain social influences?"

“The type has not sufficient novelty to prove amusing,” Travers answered, shrugging his shoulders. "She is a vain, frivolous creature, with malice enough. however, to be dangerous, whom Miss Meynell is dragging along for some inscrutable reason of her own."

“And Mademoiselle Dorothea has no power to amuse you either?" asked Russell. “I confess she amuses me greatly. She is piquant to a degree, and her follies are all the follies of cleverness.”

“lf by that you mean that her opinion of her own cleverness is stupendous, you are not far wrong." said Mr. Travers with some acrimony. "A more self-conceited young person it would be difficult to find. Heavens! how different the older sister was at her age! But this is only a spoiled child."

"So much the more reason for not trying her temper," said Russell. “I think you hardly know how exasperating your manner is sometimes. Come, come, instead of forebodings, let us determine to make this expedition a success and a model for all who shall come after us.”

“A success!" cried the general, who appeared in time to hear the last words. "Why, of course it will be a success — what should prevent it? And now what do you both say to a game of whist? My friend Judge Hildreth will join us in a moment, and there are worse ways of passing time, eh?"

Meanwhile, as the train, flying westward, left the great river behind, the air soon grew soft and mild, the sunshine broke through the clouds, filling with beautiful effects the swamps through which the railroad presently passed — a tropical-looking region of moss-draped trees and sword-like palmettoes, of luxuriant climbing vines, and dark, shining water, weird, mysterious, fascinating to eye and fancy, as the glance strove to pierce its dim, green recesses; but speaking of an enemy more deadly than the tiger of Eastern jungles in the fever that lurked beneath its beauty. The afternoon was far advanced when they finally emerged from these scenes into a fair and fertile land, level as a sea and green as summer — the lovely country of western Louisiana, the refuge of the banished Acadians, the home of those émigrés from France who brought with them to the New World many of the fairest traditions and customs of that old order, over which in their native land the bloody scythe of the Revolution swept. Here one charming picture after another passed before the gaze. Sugar plantations followed each other in close succession, the luxuriant cane partly cut in the fields, the tall chimneys of the sugar-mills belching forth smoke, for it was the height of the sugar-making season; the homes of the planters — great, old, spacious Southern houses, embowered in giant live-oaks— standing on the banks of the Téche, loveliest and most famous of Louisiana waters. Travers, who knew the region well, pointed out many familiar landmarks to General Meynell, who had not seen it for years.

"What a charming country it was!" said the general with a sigh. "And what an ideal life they lived here in *ante-bellum* days! There was wealth without the feverish rush and covetous struggle which is the curse of our day, there was the leisure for mental and social culture, the inheritance of good blood and fine manners, and the exercise of a hospitality as boundless as it was perfect. There is nothing like it now."

"The conditions of life have so changed that a revival of it is impossible," said Travers. "Yet much of the aroma of the past still lingers among these old homes on the Téche. There are few things I enjoy more than a visit down here."

"Some of the aspects of the country are wonderfully picturesque," said Russell. "I know of nothing more fascinating than the scenery along these bayous, while as one approaches the Gulf, the vast, wind-swept plains and marshes, with their herds of cattle, their wide waters and marvellous skies, are full of the most delightful suggestions of poetry. Among these French Acadians another Mistral should arise to give us a *Mirieo* of the New World, with its scenes laid in that region."

"It might be a perfect idyl," said Dorothea. "I know the country of which you speak, and it possesses a haunting spell. One can never forget its singular charm— so beautiful and so poetical. What sunsets I have seen on those immense green expanses, where land and water and sky seem to have their meeting-place!"

"There is something of a sunset preparing for us now," observed Travers. "And in the way of landscape, I think the scenes we arc passing through at present are not to be despised.*'

It was indeed a land of pastoral loveliness which spread before them in the long, golden light of the sinking sun. Wide fields rich with tropical cane, broad meadows across which groups of cattle were slowly moving, clear streams shining with sunset reflections, noble trees bending to the water's edge or forming picturesque masses of foliage against the sky, the columns of smoke from the sugar-mills were turning to glorified vapour in the last rays of the sunlight, and the great old dwellings under their spreading shade looked the very abodes of peace. Green, fair,

steeped in repose the smiling country lay, as the sun finally sank beneath the horizon, leaving behind a sunset pomp which filled heaven and earth with its fleeting splendour.

> “‘They who dwell there have named it the
> Eden of Louisiana,’”

murmured Margaret Langdon softly, as in the wonderful glow the outspread land was more than ever like a dream of Arcadia, while the train sped through its green levels towards the glorious gates of colour that seemed opening beyond into an even fairer and more celestial country. It was an enchanting picture. The radiant sky flung over everything its magical light and colour — over broads fields and shadowy woods, over gleaming waters and distant figures of men and cattle. Even the prosaic car was transformed into a palace of light, and Dorothea's fair hair shone like the aureole of a saint. And when the splendour presently faded, it was with the softest and most exquisite changes from dazzling radiance to tints that might have been borrowed from an angel's wing, ethereal aquamarine, delicate rose, dashes of carmine and shining gold, passing into the tender hues of twilight which fell at last like a veil over the face of earth, while the silver crescent of a new moon gleamed out of the still tinted west.

"I must say," remarked Travers, when they finally turned from the darkening landscape to the well-lighted car and the well-spread tables which had meanwhile been arranged for them, “that it is not often a railroad, or anything else for that matter, proves its right to a poetical name as undeniably as this line, which calls itself the Sunset Route, has this evening established its claim to the title. Do you furnish such sunsets every day?" he inquired, turning to the porter who stood near, ready to render any service to a party whose appearance so unmistakably bespoke the probability of liberal tips.

“Never fails, sah," responded the official promptly. “Always has 'em on hand — regular business, sah."

“But that is not what the name really means, Mr. Travers," said Miss Graham in a tone of mild correction. "It is called the Sunset Route because it goes west to the Pacific Ocean, you know."

"Why not to the Evening Star?" asked the gentleman thus enlightened. "Pray allow even railroads to import a little poetry into their very prosaic affairs, my dear Miss Graham. Who would not be glad to take a ticket to the sunset if he could? And hope to find no stupid beauties when he reached there!" added the speaker in a lower tone, as he seated himself at table with Mrs. Langdon and the general, leaving Russell to share that of the two younger ladies.

Mrs. Langdon shook her head, smiling:. "Whatever else she may be, Violet Graham is not stupid," she said. "But it may serve her purpose occasionally to affect stupidity — especially where your remarks are concerned."

"I know that she detests me," he replied, "but really any affectation of stupidity on her part is unnecessary and does great injustice to nature, which has endowed her so liberally in that respect."

Table of Contents

Chapter IV.

The Pass of the Eagle.

The vague, soft darkness of a moonless, windless night—for it was close upon midnight and the slender young moon had long since vanished below the western horizon—a wide, overarching sky thickset with shining stars, masses of hills faintly outlined around the old Pass of the Eagle, and a sense of vast, far-stretching distance in the dimly seen expanse of country towards which the train moved slowly across the Rio Grande, hardly visible through the obscurity as it flowed in its shrunken, winter current far below. Russell uttered something like a sigh of content as he turned his face to meet the caress of the air that came from the wide, dark plains beyond the river.

“No one,” he remarked to Travers, who was standing with him on the platform of the car, “can understand the fascination of this country until he returns to it after an absence. One’s heart expands as one says to one’s self, ‘Yonder lies Mexico!’—the land of wonders and of mystery, the land as full of romance as other lands are full of commonplace, the land that for the artist, the poet, and the scholar possesses a spell second to none that I know, in its beauty, its interest, its wonderful and varied charm. Think of it as it lies before us under this mantle of darkness! Let your fancy wander over its trackless sierras, its wide plains, its walled cities, its ruins whose story no man can read, its ancient and strangely gifted people, its history—But really I beg your pardon!” he broke off with a laugh. “One has no right to bore one’s friends with one’s enthusiasms, however great they may be.”

"I envy the man who has a subject upon which he finds it possible to become enthusiastic," said Travers. "If you can only help us to see Mexico with your eyes, my dear fellow, you will confer a benefit that cannot be overrated. And" — as the train passed from the bridge to solid earth again — “here we are! This is the soil of Mexico."

“You may congratulate yourself, as far as the ordeal of the custom-house is concerned, that it is the soil of Mexico," said Russell. "The officials on this side treat travellers and their luggage with the utmost consideration."

"That is good news, at all events," observed a feminine voice in the door behind them. “Of course, I have nothing contraband in my possession," pursued Miss Meynell, stepping out on the platform, “but, none the less, one dislikes to have one's things tumbled and disarranged by rude men."

"There are no rude men in Mexico," said Russell. "I promise that you will not find a fold of lace disarranged when you open your trunk after the custom-house examination. Give the keys to your father and go to bed in peace. We shall be here for an hour or two."

"Where are we?"

"In the town of Piedras Negras, otherwise Ciudad Porfirio Diaz, Americanised and uninteresting, as most border towns are. Don't think of it, but think of the country into which you have entered, and which lies before you like an unread page, glowing with colour, romance, and interest."

"Really," said Travers, "if Russell is allowed to go on like this as soon as we have set foot on Mexican ground, I should like to know what we may expect when we come to something a little more definite than an unknown country wrapped in darkness."

"I understand exactly what Mr. Russell means," cried Dorothea, eagerly. "It is because we are just on the threshold of the country, and it lies before us under the shadow of night, unread and unknown, that his imagination takes in everything— its beauty and poetry, its mystery and charm, its past and present."

"You are a hopeless pair," Travers observed, throwing away his cigar, "and I shall leave you to inflame each other's imaginations while I go and refresh myself with a little prose in the person of—I beg pardon, Miss Graham! I did not see that you were coming out."

There had been a momentary danger of collision in the door, where now appeared the tall, graceful figure of the young lady to whom he spoke.

"I am looking for General Meynell or Mr. Russell," she said, in her musical voice, that always had a plaintive ring in it, "for *somebody* who can tell me about the custom-house examination. I am wretched to think of those officials tearing out my carefully packed gowns! I have not brought many toilettes on a journey of this kind, but still—"

"Still there are enough to contain possibilities of laceration for your feelings," said T ravers. "I quite comprehend. But Russell engages that both your feelings and your toilettes shall be spared. Russell, come and reassure Miss Graham with regard to the examination of her trunks."

Thus invoked, Russell, who had taken refuge on the lowest step of the platform, was forced to reappear and soothe Miss Graham's anxiety concerning her cherished gowns.

"Pooh, pooh!" said the general, suddenly emerging from the car. "Come and see the examination yourself, if you are so uneasy. But Russell says there is no trouble to apprehend, and we have implicit faith in Russell, you know. The best thing to do is to give me your keys and not worry at all."

Miss Graham hesitated for a moment, but evidently she could not bring herself to trust anything so precious as those keys to the easy-going general. She finally said, with an air of resolution, "I should prefer to go myself. Sometimes the presence of a lady has an effect."

"I think you are wise," said Travers gravely. "A smile judiciously bestowed has been known to work even greater wonders than the softening of a custom-house official."

"Well, Dorothea," said her father, "are you coming too?"

Dorothea could not in courtesy allow her friend to go alone, so the party strolled down to the custom-house, where they found their luggage ready for inspection, and where the inspection, when it took place, justified all that Russell had said of the courtesy of the officials. Miss Graham was inclined to attribute the extreme consideration shown in the perfunctory examination to the effect of the smiles she liberally bestowed upon the examiner, but when she saw the next trunk in order, that of a pale, careworn woman, whose fascinating qualities, if she possessed any, were certainly not apparent to outward view, treated with equal consideration, she was forced to abandon the flattering theory, and only accept the result with relief and gratitude.

"What a lovely thing is courtesy!" said Dorothea meditatively, as they presently retraced their steps towards the waiting train. "And what a mistake the Anglo-Saxon makes when he considers it incompatible with what he calls business or official duty!"

"Oh! the Anglo-Saxon, taken in the mass, is generally more or less of a brute," remarked Travers carelessly. “The grace of fine manners has always been unknown to the race, except when carefully cultivated in the higher classes."

"Every race, as well as every individual, has *les défauts de ses qualités*," said Russell. "A race strong in physical force is likely to be somewhat brutal and obtuse. But courtesy is the birthright of a Mexican. It pervades the country like a perfume, and is as certain to be found in an adobe hut as in a palace."

“How glad I am that we are in Mexico!" said Dorothea, "and still more glad that we have Mr. Russell to interpret it for us."

"Yes," said her father dryly, "I am inclined to think that without Russell we might possibly exhibit some Anglo-Saxon obtuseness ourselves."

It was the sun himself who waked Dorothea the next morning, as if to tell her that she had entered the land where he reigns supreme, and where it is little wonder that he had his priests and worshippers of old. Even through the thick window-shade his rays pierced so insistently to touch her sleeping lids, that they were constrained to unclose; and extending her hand she lifted cautiously a little of the curtain, lest too much splendour should overwhelm her vision, and looked out. What she saw was a wide plain bounded by distant mountains and flooded with such an excess of light, such clear and dazzling radiance, as she had never beheld before. The great god of day had just risen in his majesty above the crest of the eastern sierras, and his level rays filled all the wide scene with gold, save the sides of the mountains, where soft, purple shadows yet hung. It was desert over which that resplendent mantle of glory was spread; but to Dorothea’s dazzled eyes it looked too radiant for mere earthly land. The wide, sun-kissed expanse, extending to the foot of those divine heights with their changing robes of colour, the translucent atmosphere, the vast, marvellous sky, the all pervading blaze of light, the indefinable sense of breathing a new and rarefied air, all gave the impression of a veritable Land of the Sun, where the earth had yearned upwards, as it were, to meet his ardent kiss, and where he had poured his rays upon her with the passion of a lover through unnumbered ages.

But the eye brings its own power of seeing, and it was not remarkable that such an impression was not shared by all the party. “An inspiriting kind of landscape this!” said the general, taking a comprehensive survey of the wide waste, covered with low-growing sage bushes and yucca palms, as he sat down to breakfast. On one side very near at hand, apparently—were a range of dark, volcanic-looking hills, and on the other, bounding the far-stretching expanse of the level plain, a line of more distant mountains, wrapped in a veil of softest azure. “It is neither more nor less than a desert!” he added, cracking the shell of his egg with a sharp stroke.

“Exactly that,” answered Russell. “I warned you not to expect anything of interest to-day. Our route lies altogether over this desert, until we reach Torreon this evening.”

“But I find a great deal of beauty here,” said Margaret Langdon, also looking out over the scene with her grey eyes shining in the clear morning light. “There is such a sense of unlimited expansion in this plain, such breadth of sky, such floods of sunshine, and such wonderful tints on the mountains. See how that nearer range is purple almost to blackness, while what tender aerial shades of blue are on those distant heights!”

Miss Graham turned and made a little movement of repulsion as she looked out of the window beside her. They were now running so close to the nearer hills that it almost seemed as if a stone thrown from the train might strike them, and they stood fully revealed in all their rugged harshness, their abrupt sides covered only with cacti and scattered masses of black volcanic rock. It is impossible to imagine anything more forbidding than they thus appeared. They seemed to have been fashioned by Nature in her most savage mood.

"Do you really find anything to admire in those?" asked the young lady with excusable surprise. “I had no idea before that hills could be so hideous."

“They are so young," said Travers, in a tone of apology. Russell has just been explaining that that is what is the matter with them. They are full of the crudity of youth, to which, you know, many things must be excused. And hills are unlike people in one respect — they grow better looking as they grow older. We may hope much for the softening effect of time on these. A few thousand years hence they will no doubt have improved much in appearance."

"The conductor has been telling me a gruesome story," said the general, “about some place among them where, when the survey for the road was made, the party discovered a cave full of human bones."

"They are certainly savage and desolate enough for anything," said Dorothea. "A very fitting place to find a cave full of human bones. How did the discoverers account for them? Was an ogre supposed to have made his home there in times past?"

"The theory seemed to be that it was a place where brigands disposed of their victims," answered the general; "but of course no one could tell."

"The brigand theory is plausible," observed Travers, "only I was under the impression that those gentlemen usually selected high-roads rather than deserts for their operations."

"That fact is what makes the theory plausible," said Russell. “The high-road from Monterey to Parras crosses this desert and enters between these hills near the spot where the discovery was said to have been made.”

“And unless all reports err,” said the general, “brigandage was for many years, if it is not still, the curse of the country.”

“An undeniable fact,” said Russell, “and not to be wondered at when one remembers that, from the time of the first rising for independence, the country hardly knew a day of peace for more than half a century. Guerrilla bands infested it, and, under cover of the constant warfare, robbery and slaughter abounded. No one who knows anything of the effect of war, especially civil war, can be surprised at such a result. It is only surprising that, after seventy years of almost constant revolution, lawlessness and anarchy could so soon have been subdued, and the people have settled into the condition of law-abiding order we now find.”

“And is brigandage extinct?” asked Travers.

“Practically so. In wild, remote parts of the country it may yet linger a little; but the government is untiring in efforts to suppress it, and these efforts are severe enough to be effectual. I may remark, in passing, that one never hears of train robbers in Mexico. They are a feature peculiar to our high civilisation across the border.”

“That is a comfort at any rate,” said Dorothea, “for this road would offer an excellent opportunity for them. We might all be murdered and thrown into a cave without any possible chance of rescue.”

With such light talk they managed to dispose of an hour or so of the long day, in which they were assured there would be nothing to see. And yet to one or two, at least , there was so much to see that even the books with which they had provided themselves in liberal quantity failed to attract their attention. There was no change, and yet an infinite variety, in the great desert over which they sped steadily southward. Dorothea presently induced the porter to place a camp-stool for her on the rear platform of the car, where under the shade of a large parasol she sat, delighting her eyes with the atmospheric effects that converted the waste into a wonderland. Steeped in sunshine, the great plain, with its palms and cacti and white, dazzling alkali soil, assumed an ocean-like variety of tint as it stretched away into remote distance, blending at last into what seemed to be sparkling, tree-fringed lakes, lying at the base of the distant heights — but which in reality was only a mirage that changed and shifted constantly. The mountains that bounded these wide leagues of space on each hand were full of inexhaustible charm and ever-changing beauty, as they threw their spurs out upon the plain, broken into fantastic forms, wildly desolate and darkly purple or brown, or lay against the remote horizon in robes of celestial hue and dreamy softness, while fleecy masses of white clouds were piled above their crests or tossed with feathery lightness into their violet gorges. Marvellous was the variety of transformations which they underwent, marvellous the fascination of the changes wrought by every mile of distance, and most marvellous the impression which the whole scene in its mingled beauty and desolation produced upon the imagination. On the vast expanse there was no human habitation, no movement of man or beast. Nature had taken this realm for her own, by withholding the saving water that would have made it blossom like the rose; but in compensation she had flung over it her most royal colours, arched above it her most brilliant sky, fanned it with the freedom of her purest airs, and, desert though it was, given it a strange and penetrating charm which many of the garden spots of the earth lack.

"But one would need to be a poet to express it," said Dorothea softly to herself — yet, softly as she spoke, the words were heard by one of whose presence near her she had been unconscious.

“What is it that we are told?" observed a voice above her head. “‘To have the deep poetic heart is more than all poetic speech'? Be satisfied with possessing the heart, and never mind the speech."

She turned and, glancing up, found Travers standing in the open door behind her.

“I should be quite satisfied if I thought that I possessed it,” said she, “but that is nonsense, you know.”

“I am not sure that it is nonsense,” he answered. "An artistic eye and a poetic perception are both required to perceive any beauty in this scene. To most people it would be only a sun-parched waste, made up of desolate plain and savage mountains.”

“But the colour, the changing aspects and contrasts, the breadth of horizon, the loveliness of outline and purity of tint, the sense of infinite expansion—surely any one able to feel at all must recognise the beauty of all this!”

“Doubtful. It requires a peculiar faculty of appreciation. At all events let us imagine so. It is a very solid comfort to be able to feel one’s self superior to the majority of mankind, on whom all fine and subtle effects in nature or in art are wasted.”

“What an immense amount of comfort you must have, then!” said Dorothea. “I never knew any one likely to derive more from that particular consideration.”

He Laughed. “I must acknowledge that I do,” he said. “And why not? One does not have so many sources of comfort in this best of all possible worlds, that one should neglect any of a satisfactory nature. Honestly, now, don’t you plume yourself a little on seeing and feeling things that the commonplace herd never see or feel?”

“I never allow myself to think of my fellow-creatures as a commonplace herd,” she replied promptly. “And I never encourage sentiments of vanity—never! Pray understand that, Mr. Travers.”

“I bow before your superior virtue, then. For my part I encourage everything that tends to make life more agreeable; and a comfortable belief in one’s own superiority certainly does so. I confess, also, that I do not believe in modest merit. No one ever had powers above those of his fellows without being fully aware of it.”

“But it does not follow that he was vain of it,” cried the girl quickly. “It is a bad rule to judge everybody by yourself. Here is Mr. Russell. *He* certainly is not vain, or arrogant, or anything else disagreeable, and yet he must know he has powers very much above those of most people.”

View of Zacatecas, with front of cathedral

“Oh! Russell is rather a remarkable person,” replied Mr. Travers carelessly “He must know, as you say, that he is not exactly ordinary, but he is a master in the art of concealing the fact—aware, probably, that what people resent is not so much a man’s superiority as his own

knowledge of it. But here he comes, to speak for himself! Russell, Miss Meynell has just been remarking how successfully you conceal the vanity with which it is useless to suppose you are not burdened as heavily as the rest of us."

"I *don't* imagine," said that gentleman; "I am sure that I don't conceal mine. But I hope to learn a little humility by the time we finish this journey. With Russell on one side to instruct, and you on the other to snub me—not to speak of Miss Graham's praiseworthy efforts in the same direction—I shall probably find my self-conceit materially reduced when we cross the Rio Grande again. By the by, Russell, is there no other route by which we could have entered the country except through such a desert as this?"

"Oh, yes!" Russell replied, "there are other routes, but we have chosen this line because it brings us at once into the heart of the land you have come to see, the ancient land of the Aztec and the Spaniard, with its brilliant, picturesque cities, absolutely unlike any others on the soil of the New World. You will see one of them to-morrow," he said, smiling at Dorothea, "and you will feel as if an ocean must surely roll between it and the country you have left."

"So much the better!" she cried. "And its name?"

"Zacatécas."

She knitted her brows in an effort of remembrance. "I recall the name, but not what is said of the place. I must read it up in Mr. Janvier's *Guide*. I could never, by the way, have imagined, until I saw that book, how excellent would be the result of inducing a literary artist to write a guide-book. This is not only full of information, but it is told in the most delightful manner."

"And, better yet, all the information is accurate," said Russell. "Unlike some other literary artists, Mr. Janvier never distorts or embroiders facts for effect. When I first entered Mexico his guide-book was my constant companion in all my wandering, and I never yet found it at fault. He is always as accurate in fact as he is charming in style, and his knowledge of the country is to be specially relied upon because it is founded on the sympathy without which true comprehension is impossible. He knows Mexico thoroughly because he loves it, as all who really know it must."

"But why bother with guide-books, however accurate and charming, when here is Russell to tell you all you want to know?" queried Travers. "Follow my example, and apply boldly to him for any desired information. Now, about this place with the remarkable name. What is it noted for, as the geographies of my youth were wont to ask?"

"A geographer," answered Russell, "would probably reply that it is noted for its mines, which have produced vast quantities of silver ; for its picturesqueness — or do geographers notice that?— and for its great altitude. It lies about eight thousand feet above the sea."

"Higher than any mountain on our Atlantic coast!" said Dorothea in an awed tone. "What a wonderful region the plateau of Mexico must be!"

"We do not seem to be ascending very much at present," said Travers, glancing around the wide, level expanse.

"We have, however, been ascending ever since we left the Rio Grande," Russell replied, "and to-night we shall climb several thousand feet more. Then our way will lie along that great volcanic ridge, the table-land between two oceans, which fanned by the airs of both, with its varied elevations giving every variety of climate and product, its beautiful lakes, its vast plains

and mountains, is, in its natural features alone, one of the most interesting regions of the world. Humboldt says — but I must really have compassion on you! Never mind what Humboldt says, at present."

“But I mind," cried Dorothea. "If you think that I will consent to be cheated out of information so interesting in that manner, you are mistaken. I insist on hearing what Humboldt says of the plateau of Mexico."

"That is rather a large demand to fill," said Russell, smiling; "but a desire so laudable should be encouraged. Meanwhile, are you aware that the glare of this alkali soil is very great? Have you no fear of the feminine *bête noir* — sun-burn? I really think you will find it pleasanter within."

"If I come will you tell me what Humboldt says?" she asked, holding on to her point with pertinacity.

“I will do better than that," Russell answered. "You shall read it for yourself. I will show you what he has written of the wonderful region in which you will be to-morrow."

“With that inducement I shall go in," said, she, rising. "I will pull down the blinds so that the sky and the hills and the mirage shall not tempt me; and devote myself to acquiring information about the country. Mr. Travers, is it worth while to advise you to do likewise?"

"I am constrained to make the humiliating confession that I have at present imbibed as much information as I feel myself able to digest," replied Mr. Travers with an air befitting the confession. "I think that I shall relax my mind over a novel and a cigar, and admire your and Russell's industry from afar. The spring of my enthusiasm is extremely likely to become dry if I pump it too persistently. One must humour one's self in these things. "

"As far as I can perceive," responded Dorothea unkindly, "you humour yourself in all things. We will leave you, then, to your novel and your cigar, and hope that the spring of your enthusiasm will have sufficiently filled for you to appreciate Zacatécas when we reach it. Come, Mr. Russell. Let us go in and read Humboldt."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER V.

A CITY OF THE SKY.

Brown, bare, savage in their wildness and grandeur, the mountains that enclose Zacatécas stand. As the train climbs their steep grades and winds in curve after curve around their great shoulders, there is a shifting panorama of deep gorges and towering heights, vast red-brown hillsides without a spear of vegetation, crossed only by the lines of white boundary stones that mark the extent of the different mining claims; and, as the city is approached, mine after mine in close succession, each surrounded by massive stone walls, each marked by the curious, drum-like *malacatas*, the chimneys of its furnaces, and the square enclosure in which numbers of mules are working ore by the *patio* process. For this is the centre of one of the great silver

districts of Mexico, and from these heights, of aspect so desolate and forbidding, a kingdom's ransom in the precious metal has been drawn.

"This is really very interesting," said the general, as the train winds around the mountain-side, and it would be possible to drop a stone into many of the reduction works which line the gorges, where men and mules look Lilliputian from the great altitude of the track. Broad, smooth roads led by easy gradients around the hillsides towards these mines, and along them pass constantly strings of laden *burros*, men in wide, white trousers and gaily-striped blankets, horsemen with picturesque and fantastic accoutrements shining in the sunlight. There is a stir of life and activity everywhere, all things indicate the centre of a great industry and the neighbourhood of a populous city, while in the crystalline clearness of the rarefied atmosphere, with the dazzling sunshine, intensely blue sky, and massive red-brown heights, the whole picture is vivid and impressive in the extreme, full of colour and absolutely foreign in every feature to the eyes that gaze with fascinated interest upon it.

"And is it possible that all those are mines?" asked Dorothea somewhat incredulously — “those fortress-like masses of buildings, and those curious enclosures where strings of mules are walking about in black mud?"

“That black mud," said Russell, “is the precious silver ore, reduced to a pulp and united with quicksilver — an amalgamating process invented in Mexico soon after the Conquest. But see!— there is the first glimpse of Zacat écas!"

They all looked eagerly. Higher and higher the engine had been climbing, panting like some over-burdened monster the while, until suddenly there was a swiftly-passing picture of a city that seemed transported from the Orient, with its mass of flat-roofed houses, its shining domes and slender towers, set in a deep, narrow valley and forming an indescribable mass of soft colour, framed by the brown, rugged heights. Then the hills closed again, the beautiful picture was lost, and, with a final curve, the train stopped at the station of Zacat écas, although the city itself remained hidden from sight.

"How charming!" cried Dorothea as she sprang to her feet. "The whole thing has a savour of magic. Great bare, savage heights, studded with fortresses for mines, and suddenly a glimpse of— Bagdad, is it? or Damascus? or Granada? — lying in the deep brown valley, glistening with a thousand tints, and disappearing like a phantom of the imagination."

The first thing of which the party were conscious, when they stepped out upon the platform of the station, was the presence of a very chill and penetrating air, which made it necessary to button cloaks and overcoats closely. Miss Graham glanced reproachfully at Russell. "I thought," she observed, "that we should find warm weather in Mexico."

"In Mexico, as elsewhere, it is likely to be cold on a mountain,” Russell replied ; “and you must remember that we are at the very respectable elevation of about a mile and a half above the sea."

“The temperature strikers me as quite pleasant," said the general. “Chilly, it is true, but bracing."

"Whenever a temperature is cold enough to be disagreeable, it is supposed to be bracing," said Dorothea. “For my part, I object exceedingly to being braced. The very term implies unpleasantness.”

"What a picturesque throng of people!" said Mrs. Langdon. "We have come into a new world indeed."

Whether new or old — and surely most old in its aspects and suggestions, alike of Europe and the ancient East — a wonderful world certainly to eyes fresh from the commonplace life of modem America! The dark, graceful people, with their gentle manners and sweet-toned speech, their costumes varied for every class and every occupation, seem separated by the distance of half the globe, rather than by a few hours of travel, from the world left behind. No wonder that the party paused and gazed, forgetful of all else for a moment, at the scene before them. It was such a scene as may be witnessed on the arrival of the train at the station of any important Mexican town, one which a moderate sojourn in the country renders very familiar, but which is full of striking novelty and interest to the new-comer. Women with softly-tinted faces and melting dark eyes, draped in the long blue scarfs or *rebozos* of the lower orders; men of the same class, with their slender, sinewy figures dressed in white cotton cloth with bright-colored *zarapes* tossed over their shoulders; *cargadores*, or porters, wearing the broad leather band by which they carry hundreds of pounds weight upon their backs; venders of fruits and *dulces* offering their commodities with insinuating grace; gentlemen in closely-fitting trousers of cloth or buckskin ornamented down the sides with rows of silver buttons, short, richly-embroidered jacket and *sombrero*, also lavishly trimmed with silver; ladies with the black *mantilla* over their heads, or the abundant coils of their dark hair left uncovered while the drapery slips to their shoulders — all form an assemblage so full of the colour and grace in which modern life is for the most part conspicuously lacking, that no after impression can deepen or efface the first strong sense of absolute strangeness, and a picturesque quality altogether charming.

But the general was meanwhile looking around for Zacatécas. "Where has the city hidden itself?" he asked. “And how are we to reach it?"

“By tramway apparently," said Travers. "Carriages appear to be an unknown luxury here.”

"They are rather a useless luxury, as you will soon perceive," said Russell.

And indeed, as they were borne down the steep slope of the hill on which the station stands, by a tramcar that sped along as fast as its small and lively mules could gallop, they perceived that there was scant room for wheeled vehicles in the narrow, precipitous streets they entered.

The valley in which the city lies is a ravine between steeply ascending heights, up the sides of which the buildings have climbed in successive terraces, with a result very delightful to the eye, though probably not so admirable from a sanitary point of view. But notwithstanding the difficulties of the situation, the place has all the air of cleanliness that distinguishes Mexican cities. The prevailing tone of colour is a soft terracotta, derived from the reddish-brown stone of which it is chiefly built, that harmonises well with the deeper brown of the enclosing hills, the dazzling sapphire of the overarching sky, the richness of abounding sculpture, the jewel-like flash of highly-glazed tiles, and the brilliant touches of colour in the garb of the people who fill the streets that ran up and down between houses built with Old World solidity, on that ancient model brought by the Moors into the Iberian peninsula so long ago, and thence borne across the western seas to the land of New Spain.

The tramway carried the strangers rapidly into the heart of this quaint and charming city. After a brief visit to a hotel, where rooms were engaged, and where the cloistral arches surrounding its court seemed full of the memory of the banished nuns whose home was here for long years of peace

"They do, with comparatively few exceptions," said Russell. “The proportion of pure Spanish blood in Mexico is very small. Spain civilised and ruled the countries she discovered — she did not repopulate them. Hence, when the rulers withdrew, the natives remained in possession. There would not be one of these dark faces to be seen had the conquerors of Mexico belonged to the same race as the settlers of North America. Yet the descendants of those who robbed utterly and exterminated entirely our native races hold up their hands in pious horror at the conduct of the Spaniards, who have left Mexico possessed by Mexicans."

"I also find," said the general, "that I had very little idea of the work which Spain did here. If she filled her treasury with the riches of Mexico, she certainly spent a vast amount of those riches in the country. And her work is so well done — so splendid and so enduring — that it shames the work of other civilisers and settlers."

"The material side of the work is, indeed, magnificent," said Russell. "The public buildings, churches, aqueducts, roads, and bridges— all of these, as you remark, shame our work of the present day; but that is trifling compared to the greater work of civilising and Christianising this people. Think of it for a moment! Here is one part of North America possessed by a native race, lifted to a higher plane of civilisation than was ever before attained by any race of men in the same length of time. Putting aside the romantic fictions of Aztec civilisation, we know that in reality Spain found these people savages, practising the very worst and most cruel idolatry; and she has left them civilised, intelligent, and Christian to the core, let their calumniators and detractors say what they will to the contrary."

Here Miss Graham yawned in a manner expressive of a mental weariness calculated to touch the hardest heart. Standing a tall, graceful figure in her perfectly-fitting tailor-made gown, she had beguiled the interval of the above conversation in observing with a critical eye the black-clad, mantilla-draped ladies passing by, and she now communicated the result of her observations to Dorothea. “One thing at least is certain," she said; “style has not yet penetrated into Mexico."

Russell, hearing the remark, laughed. “Suspend judgment on that point. Miss Graham, until we reach the City of Mexico," he said. "You will fancy yourself among the modes of Paris then."

"Let us thank Heaven," said Dorothea impatiently, "that there are a few corners of the world left where the modes of Paris and the cult of Redfern have not penetrated. My dear Violet, I know that I am blaspheming all your gods — but really, to talk of style in the face of such scenes as these is too much!"

Miss Graham, looking slightly offended, replied that she had not been aware that style was a subject which could be out of place in any scene. "I shall get one or two of these mantillas of Spanish lace before I leave the country," she added meditatively. "They will come in well for drapery, or for fancy balls."

"You have not yet seen the west front of the cathedral," said Russell, addressing the party a little hastily — for he feared that the smile on Travers' lip would irritate Dorothea into retort;

and for the same reason, probably, he went on talking as they turned away in the direction indicated. “These great Mexican churches," he said, "all belong architecturally to the order of the Spanish Renaissance, which, with its noble harmony of outline and florid magnificence of detail, has always seemed to me specially appropriate to this wonderful land of New Spain in the days of its fabulous wealth."

“That is certainly a magnificent façade!" said the general as they paused before the vast front of the cathedral, the entire central portion of which is a mass of elaborate sculpture, with life-size statues of our Lord and the Apostles set in niches between richly decorated columns, and the ornate yet harmonious splendour of the whole broken by cornices into three stately stories. The sides of the façade are of plain, admirably cut stone, crowned by the noble towers, one (apparently unfinished but most effective) consisting of a single story, a square mass of the richest imaginable carving, the other rising with exquisite proportions into a second story, and equally rich in decoration, while at the farther end of the edifice the great tile-encrusted Byzantine dome lifts itself, with an incomparable effect of lightness and grace, above the massive walls and flat roof.

“Tell us something of the history of this church,” said Dorothea. “It is too old and too splendid not to have a history."

“Every church in Mexico has a history," said Russell, “so interwoven with all the past of the country, so rich in poetry and picturesqueness, that it is like an idyl rather than a history."

“And this church?" she persisted, looking up into his face with her eyes shining.

He smiled down at her. "Let your fancy, then, go back to a day close upon three hundred and fifty years ago, when into this valley came the noble Spaniard Juan do Tolosa, bringing with him certain Franciscan fathers bent upon their work of converting the natives to Christianity. Juan de Tolosa encamped, we are told, at the foot of the Bufa— that great hill yonder which closes and dominates the valley — and the holy fathers, planting their cross, gathered the natives around them and began the preaching which never failed of success. The Indians, who must have been as gentle and friendly as they are to-day, showed Tolosa the silver lodes whence resulted the foundation of the city; and on the consecrated spot where the cross had been first set up, the parish church was built. This being presently rebuilt with great splendour, became the cathedral when Zacatécas was erected into a see. That is all I can tell you of it — the bare outline of its history. All that it has witnessed, all the life of which it has been the centre for these three centuries, you must imagine for yourself."

"It is not difficult to imagine," said the girl musingly. "And it has had its vicissitudes, has it not? It has suffered from spoliation?"

"Few Mexican churches have suffered more. Before the confiscation of church property its interior adornments were as rich as wealth and pious generosity could make them. When men were drawing millions from the silver lodes beneath our feet it seemed to them a proper and natural thing to bestow a small proportion of these riches on the sanctuary of God. But other men with other ideas have since arisen, who have not hesitated to despoil the church of these gifts in order to pay the cost of revolutions — and fill the coffers of their leaders. History repeats itself, as we know; and the cupidity which covets such riches, as well as the might which takes with a strong hand what it covets, is an old story in the world. Now shall we go in?"

As they passed from the dazzling sunshine of the outer world into the soft gloom of the church they were met by a fragrance of incense lingering still in the peaceful interior. The spacious open nave spread before them in fine perspective, its floor inlaid in Moorish pattern with the beautiful hard woods of Mexico, and polished by the knees of many generations of worshippers, the richly decorated roof sprang upward in splendid arch, and the frescoed dome soared above the high altar throned on its steps of coloured marble. Altars rich with gold lined the walls on each side; through the high windows rays of misty sunlight fell on statues in robes stiff with ancient embroidery, on dim old paintings, and candlesticks which looked as if they might have been brought from the temple of Jerusalem, as they stood holding tapers of wax as thick as a man's arm. It was all, in its faded sumptuousness, its noble space and solemn calm, like a poem full of pathos, yet of triumph too. For, though despoiled of so much of its magnificence, with the princely gifts that once adorned it taken away by the robbers in high places with whom Mexico has been so abundantly cursed, the charm of the old sanctuary still remains, and must ever remain, as long as its sculptured fa çade uplifts the symbol of redemption over the spot where the holy Franciscans planted it three hundred and fifty years ago.

Perhaps only in Spain can any other churches be found so absolutely delightful to the artistic sense as those of Mexico. Constructed with the massive solidity, the enduring strength of ages when men built not pretentious shams to last for a day, but temples in which generations might worship God for centuries, they are in every detail marvels of picturesqueness. Great gates of ancient metal-work guard chapels where the glance can scarcely pierce the twilight obscurity to distinguish the details of time-touched splendors within; pictures with the rich tones of the old Spanish painters look down from dusky corners; delicate arabesque carving delights the eye; wrought silver and carved onyx abound. And the people —ah, the people! Through the great open doorways they come and go, as little children to their mother s side to offer a caress or whisper a petition. At no hour can one enter the humblest chapel or the stateliest cathedral without witnessing a piety so unobtrusive, so unconscious, and so sincere that it cannot fail to touch and edify any one capable of receiving edification. Female figures, with their drapery drawn in graceful folds over their heads and around their shoulders, kneel before the different shrines absorbed in silent prayer; or a group may be seen together reciting the rosary or a litany in audible tones; children clasp their slender brown hands in devotional entreaty, or sit on the floor beside their mothers and gaze with dark, solemn eyes at scenes familiar as those of their own home. Men of all ages and classes come in, kneel on the pavement, pray with fervour, sometimes with arms extended in the attitude of crucifixion, then cross themselves in the devout Spanish fashion and pass out again to the world of business or pleasure. From the stately hidalgo to the sandalled peasant, who puts his basket down beside him as he kneels, all show the same devotion, the same reverence for the sacred place and the sacred presence it enshrines.

All of this the strangers found in the old cathedral of Zacat écas. Its Rembrandt-like shadows, its lofty domes and incense-laden atmosphere, seemed fit surroundings for the dark, gentle people who came and went, gliding noiselessly over the marquetry floor or kneeling motionless as statues around some carved confessional, within which sat a priest, tonsured head bent, and delicate ascetic face outlined, like a pictured saint of the Spanish or Italian school. They found a courteous sacristan who led them into the spacious sacristies, the chapter-room, and other parts of that mass of buildings, of vast vaulted chambers, long stone passages, courts

and corridors, which are comprised within the walls of a Mexican cathedral. In the dusky spaces of the great rooms were objects to set an antiquarian wild with covetous desire. Dark old chests revealed treasures of ecclesiastical embroidery, pictures of dead and gone prelates looked down from the walls, crucifixes gleamed with ivory whiteness out of dim recesses; in the baptistery they saw where the splendid font of silver valued at a hundred thousand dollars had once stood, and everywhere the picturesque delighted their eyes. It was like a dream when, emerging from these precincts, as full of the spell of the Middle Ages as if their massive walls, their cloisters and archways, had stood for ten instead of three centuries, they found themselves again in the midst of the vivid life of the plaza, its shifting colours and moving throngs.

But presently it was necessary to pause and rest, even from rich old churches, quaint markets full of colour, and the varied life of the picturesque foreign streets. Very foreign, too, was their first Mexican meal at the Hotel Zacetano. They were all pleased by the strange, savory dishes which were set before them in well-ordered succession, accompanied by some very good wine of the country, for which Russell called.

"I should have been very much disappointed if we had failed to find any savour of novelty in the food," Travers remarked. "The greatest pleasure in going away from home is to vary one's mode of living, to find a foreign flavour in everything, and certainly not least in the cuisine. But the whole world is growing so hideously commonplace and alike that this is not always easy to attain."

"Yes, I too like a foreign flavour in all things when I go abroad," said Mrs. Langdon, "and I am agreeably surprised by Mexican cookery. I had an idea that it was barbarously full of red pepper."

"*Chili*?" said Russell smiling. "It is much used in their cookery — that excellent curried rice which you liked derived its chief flavour from it — but only the lower classes use it in excess. There is no more varied *cuisine*, rich in all manner of carefully prepared and generally highly spiced dishes, than the Mexican. People who fancy that they live on *frijoles*, *tortillas*, and *chili con carne* are only acquainted with the habits of the peasants."

"*Quiere V. los frijolitos, señor*?" inquired the musical voice of a dark-eyed waiter at his elbow at the moment.

"He wants to know if we will take the national dish of beans which in Mexico closes every repast?" Russell inquired of the company.

"Tell him to bring them by all means," replied Dorothea. "We propose to be as thoroughly Mexican as possible while we are in the country."

After the frijoles had been tasted and pronounced "not bad," the dessert served, and strong, black coffee placed before them, a discussion how the afternoon should be spent was naturally in order. The general suggested a visit to the silver mines, which as the leading industry of Zacatécas should, he conceived, be deserving of the attention of intelligent travellers. But this idea was not encouraged by Russell.

"If you will allow me to advise," he said, "I think that it will be well to defer that particular line of sight-seeing until we reach Guanajuato. The mines there are more accessible and of greater interest than these."

“Oh, yes, papa!" said Dorothea. “Mr. Russell proposes something better than silver mines for this afternoon. He says there is a charming town near here called Guadalupe, to which one is conveyed by a tramway that slides down-hill by the force of gravity."

"The tramway?"

"The cars, of course— and are dragged back by mules. There seems a little novelty in that."

"There might be too much, perhaps. And what is to be seen in the place after we have reached it?"

"A beautiful old church, and — what else, Mr. Russell?"

“An exquisite chapel, a picturesque market full of native colour, an Orfanatorio—"

“Speak English, please," murmured Travers.

"Well, an orphan asylum, where the children are trained in letters and trades — an admirable institution calculated to interest philanthropic persons."

"I am not sure that we are philanthropic enough to care for the orphan asylum," said Dorothea, doubtfully, "but I am certain that we are all artistic enough to care for the chapel. So I think we had better go to Guadalupe."

"Please except me," said Miss Graham languidly. "I am neither philanthropic nor artistic, and I have seen churches enough for one day. Do you suppose" — appealing plaintively to the company in general — "that I can possibly *sleep* on the bed in my room? It is positively as hard as this," tapping the tiled floor with her foot.

“It will be a bad prospect if you cannot manage to do so," replied Russell, “since you will find few beds of any other kind in Mexico."

“What a country!" said the young lady, lifting her shoulders. “How can you all be so enthusiastic over it? Well," after an expressive pause, “if I *can* sleep on that bed, I shall go to sleep while you make your excursion this afternoon. I confess I am very tired."

“Perhaps you will be rested sufficiently to climb the Bufa with us when we return?" suggested Mrs. Langdon. "We are going there for the view at sunset."

"That terrible hill? I don't know. It will be a dreadful climb. But when you come back I will tell you whether or not I feel able to attempt it."

With this understanding the party separated ; Miss Graham betaking herself to her hard couch, to seek repose after the exhausting sight-seeing and still more exhausting enthusiasm of the morning, and the others sallying forth again to seek the tramway for Guadalupe.

It is at a rate of speed rather trying to weak nerves that the cars slide down hill, by the force of gravity, to the valley in which the pretty town lies beside its shining lake. But the lover of the picturesque is well repaid for any jars endured in the rapid transit by the beauty of the charming spot. As Oriental in aspect as the city left behind, its long, straight streets of flat-roofed houses radiate from the noble mass of buildings known as the sanctuary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, from which the town derives its name, and has its reason of being. The grand old church, with its chapel and cloisters, its quaint garden behind and park of roses in front, is in itself worthy to be the objective point of a far longer journey, as it stands, imposing in form and exquisite in colour and detail, in the midst of its harmonious surroundings. Above the sculptured façade two towers of singular beauty — the larger massive, richly carved and surmounted by a tiled minaret, the other slender, graceful, airy as a dream — rise against the dazzling sapphire of

the sky, while the iridescent surfaces of the lantern-crowned domes glisten in the sunlight with jewel-like effect.

"What a picture!" said Margaret Langdon, under her breath, as she first caught sight of it. And then to Travers, who walked beside her, she added, with a smile: "How like a parrot one feels in saying the same thing over so often! I fear we shall be totally bankrupt in expressions of admiration long before we reach the end of our travels."

"We shall grow more accustomed to the aspect of things," responded her philosophical companion, "and they will cease to affect us so strongly. Russell should have let us down more gradually. To step from the most modem and most unpicturesque of countries into the midst of one where the features of the oldest and most picturesque are mingled — the architecture of Spain, with the mountains of Switzerland and the sky of Egypt — is likely to upset one slightly."

She laughed and confessed that it was, then bade him look at the imposing front of the church as it rose before them when they entered the gateway. "There is not an inharmonious line or tint," she declared.

"It is all charming beyond expression," he replied. "And that is the reason I do not try to express what I feel, but absorb all impressions with the stoicism suggested by the Oriental character of our surroundings."

The next moment they passed through the great doors into the quiet dimness, the restful silence of the sanctuary. Nearly two centuries have passed since Fray Antonio Margil de Jesus founded this great church in honour of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, but the greater part of its original magnificence remains unimpaired by time or revolutions. Cruciform in shape, the interior is superb in size and proportion; the high altar, the fourteen minor altars, and the choir are still rich in ornament, and the whole forms a splendid and impressive edifice.

Sanctuary of Guadalupe, Zacatecas

But loveliest of all details is the *capella* — a modern addition, the gift of a lady of great wealth and devotion. Nothing can be conceived more exquisite than this little gem of art. Full of the most delicate and beautiful arabesque carving, coloured and gilded, the floor inlaid with hard polished woods, the magnificent altar rich with gold, the altar rail of silver and onyx, it is, with its frescoes and silken hangings, an offering such as the generosity of an empress could hardly surpass, or the finest taste of an artist desire to improve.

It was here that the strangers saw an admirable copy of the famous, miraculous picture of Guadalupe, henceforth in all their wanderings to be encountered everywhere, until nothing could be more familiar than the graceful form, the gentle, bending head, the splendid robe, and the star-gemmed mantle of this Lady of Mexico, with the Aztec tint upon her lovely face.

"In all religious tradition there is no more beautiful and poetic legend than that of the origin of this picture," said Russell, as they paused before it.

“Tell it to us," whispered Dorothea.

But he smiled and shook his head. “Wait until you see the original on its own hill of Tepeyac. Come, you must now look at the cloisters and garden."

So they passed to the shadowy cloisters, lined with curious old paintings representing the martyrdoms of the saints, and thence into the golden sunshine that lay over the garden, where dark-green cedars and feathery acacias lifted their tapering crests into the lucid amber of the upper air, and where beds of lilies and hedges of rose and geranium bloomed, while above this verdure rose the glistening domes and noble towers of the church.

“What a magnificent architectural mass it is!" said Dorothea, throwing her head back to catch the effect of the lovely Moorish minarets against the deep azure of the sky. “My respect for the people who erected such buildings, while *our* ancestors were, generally speaking, living in log houses, increases hourly. There does not seem to have ever been any period of crude beginnings in Mexico. The *conquistadores* and the missionaries who came with them, appear to have planted at once every element of the civilisation they left behind."

"There is no doubt of it,” said Russell. "These brilliant cities, with their magnificent churches and public buildings, existed as we see them to-day when New York and New Orleans were primitive villages. The wonder is, how long we have been in recognizing the unique charm and beauty of the country lying here at our door."

“Perhaps we are inclined to give them too much credit for their architecture,”" suggested Travers. “Remember they had never seen anything bad in structural art. Only think of it! Never to have seen a nineteenth century building! Wouldn't that be worth going back to the seventeenth century for?"

“A great many things would be worth going back to the seventeenth century for, if one could manage it," remarked Dorothea. “And in Mexico one may be able to manage it better than in most places. Here, for example, in this old monastic garden with that noble pile, which seems transported from Europe before our eyes, it is not difficult to go back two or three centuries. It would not surprise me in the least if Fray — what was his name, Mr. Russell?"

"Fray Antonio Margil de Jesús."

"Came walking down one of these paths in his Franciscan habit."

"Well, I am so far material and of the nineteenth century," said Travers, "that I confess it would surprise me very much, and not altogether agreeably. When people are dead it is, as a general rule, in better taste for them to remain dead. I wonder, by the by, if he was the same Fray Antonio Margil who founded the missions around San Antonio in Texas?"

"I do not know," replied Russell, "but it seems probable. He was at least a sufficiently interesting person to make his appearance very desirable, and if there were any hope of his coming I should be in favour of remaining for any length of time, in order to catch one glimpse of his face — the fine Spanish face, so full of mental and moral force, which one sees in all the portraits of that era. But since we are two centuries too late to hope for such a meeting, I must reluctantly state that it is time for our return to Zacatécas, if you wish to see the sunset from the Bufa."

And indeed when they reached the plaza, with its primitive booths full of gay, bright colour from fluttering *rebozos* and *zarapes*, its piles of fruit, vegetables, and pottery which make every such scene in Mexico a study for a painter, they found the tram-car on the point of departure, with six mules, harnessed three abreast, to drag it up the steep, winding way down which it had rolled so gaily. The driver, his lithe, slender form clad in the white garments of his class and girded with a crimson sash, his clear-cut face showing like an antique bronze under his wide sombrero, mounted the platform and sounded his horn in signal of departure. The spirited little mules started forward, and up the broad, well-graded road, past the silver mines and the fortress-like reduction works, the party were borne back to Zacatécas while the sunshine was still lying like a mantle of gold on the giant hills.

Miss Graham was found, equipped for walking and an evident victim of *ennui*, on the corridor overlooking the court of the hotel.

"What a time you have been!" she said, addressing the group in a tone of injury as they approached. “The churches and the orphan asylum must have proved very interesting. I have been waiting for hours! And now you are all probably too tired to go out again."

“Oh, dear, no!" replied Dorothea. "We are going at once to the Bufa, and have only stopped for you. Come, we must start quickly, or we shall miss the sunset. And it looks very formidable, that hill."

It is certainly very formidable, this great hill known as the Bufa (Buffalo), from its peculiar form, which so impressively rises above Zacatécas. Its height from the plaza is not more than five or six hundred feet; but it is so massive and abrupt that its altitude appears much greater to the eye — and also to the tired limbs of ascending pedestrians, although there is a well-built road heading upward by wide and easy gradients. The view of the town from the different curves of this road is well worth the labour of ascent. Over its narrow streets and emerald plazas, over the flat roofs of its houses with their courts full of verdure and bloom, over the sculptured towers and pearly domes of its churches, the glance wanders enchanted with the mass of soft and varied colour, the picturesque effect of the city pent in its mountain ravine. With these views, varying at every turn, to repay them, and animated by the exhortations of Dorothea, the party slowly toiled upward and were at last rewarded by finding themselves on the summit, where the little chapel of Los Remedios stands.

A famous place of pilgrimage, this church has heard innumerable prayers, and witnessed many strange and terrible scenes of war, bloodshed, and pillage, since it was placed upon this towering height close upon two hundred years ago. It is not without architectural grace, but the group who paused upon the platform where it stands had for many minutes eyes only for the prospect spread before them. The city lay directly at their feet, clasped in the close embrace of its massive brown hills, but from the crest of the Bufa the gaze swept over these hills to take in a view so wide and glorious that for a time silence was the only tribute possible to pay to it. They stood in the centre of a vast uplifted region, covered with the ridges and crests of mountain ranges, heights like Titanic storm-tossed billows, deep cañons and gorges, high valleys full of golden light, or lying in the purple shadow of the peaks surrounding them. Near at hand these giant ranges and deep, lonely ravines seemed indeed “like a solemn and tempestuous ocean, suddenly petrified with awe at the whisper of God," but as they receded into distance they wrapped themselves in veils of the most enchanting colour, while beyond Guadalupe there spread, far as the eye could reach, a wide, beautiful plain, shaded with every varied tint of brown and green, set with lakes shining like sapphires and melting afar off into mountains of divinely blue and tender purple hues. No more perfect pastoral picture could be conceived than this vast, lovely expanse, with its careful cultivation, presenting so many different yet softly-blended shades of colour to the eye, its distance dotted with great haciendas and clustered towns, and with the towers of distant cities set against the amethystine beauty of the far heights.

"Oh, what a scene!" cried Dorothea, when she found speech at last. “What a memory to carry away with one! Never have I seen anything so beautiful — never!"

"Never have I seen anything so rich in contrasting effects," said Mrs. Langdon. “Look at these wild, rugged, almost terrible mountains in the midst of which we stand, then at the city like

a dream of the Orient lying at our feet, and then at that heavenly plain, spreading into measureless distance — one is almost tempted to doubt if such a scene can be reality!"

"It is something like a mirage of the imagination," said Travers. "But I suppose it is all solid — eh, Russell?"

"Do you want some facts to establish it?" asked Russell; "for example, that seven cities can be seen from the Bufa, besides villages, haciendas, mountains, lakes—"

"I wonder," interrupted Dorothea, "if it is this marvellous atmosphere that makes one feel how high, how very high, all this region is? I have a vision of the sea breaking far below us, while we stand here, in a true Land of the Sky."

"Of course it is the atmosphere," said her father. "I was very conscious of it as I climbed the hill. It is exceedingly light, and makes exertion difficult. But this is indeed a magnificent view. And I am surprised to see what a vast extent of agricultural country lies beyond these barren hills."

"You will believe now what you heard with incredulity as we approached the city," said Russell, "that the name Zacatécas is derived from a word in the Indian tongue signifying 'place where grows the grass.' In these great valleys, which we overlook, grass of a most succulent quality grows, sheep and cattle flourish, and cereals are cultivated on an immense scale, as you may judge from the fact that one great hacienda alone produces annually between three and four hundred thousand dollars from its varied crops."

"Don't give us such prosaic details, please!" said Dorothea, dismissing the agricultural question with a wave of her hand. "Tell us something picturesque and poetical, some bit of vivid history that we may always associate with this spot."

"My *dear* Dorothea!" remonstrated Miss Graham in a feeling tone. "Have you not had enough history yet? It seems to me that Mr. Russell has done nothing but talk history since we left Now Orleans."

"You are quite right, Miss Graham," said Russell good-humouredlly. "I have certainly talked a great deal, and no doubt proved an immense bore to you."

But Dorothea turned her back impatiently upon the fair Violet, and taking his arm, shook it gently. "Tell me!" she repeated. "No one need listen who does not wish to do so. Tell me the history of this place!"

"It Is like almost every other spot in Mexico," he answered. "Within the last seventy years war and tumult have raged around it. Do not ask for details. It is best not to remember what terrible scenes it has witnessed."

"But earlier — in the days of Spanish conquest and rule?"

"Ah! of those days there are pictures enough and to spare for whoever has imagination enough to see them. You must know, then, that the first white man who entered the valley below us was Captain Pedro Almindez de Chirinos, one of the companions of Cortés. Can you not fancy him planting the standard of Spain, and entering into friendly negotiations with the Indians? But, being on his way northward to the country of the Chicemacs, he remained only three days and then passed on, escorted, however, by the natives as far as they dared venture toward the territory of the hostile tribe. Sixteen years later the gleaming armour of Juan de Tolosa comes down the valley, and the Franciscan fathers plant their cross where the cathedral towers rise yonder. What a picture the Bufa looked down upon that day! Can you not see the group of mail-

clad Spaniards and brown-robed friars, surrounded by the gentle and friendly natives? Like some great, couchant monster, guarding the treasure beneath it, this mighty hill had stood untouched for ages, but a time was now come when men were to tear the treasure out of its heart. The Indiana showed the silver lodes to Tolosa, and he forthwith sent the news to three other noble Spaniards — Baltazar Tremiño de Banuelos, Cristóbal de Oñate, and Diego de Ibarra — who share with him the honour of being the founders of Zacatécas. They opened the mines, built the city, lent every aid in their power to Christianising the natives, and their portraits, by royal order of Philip Second, are incorporated in the arms of the city."

"Thank you," said Dorothea graciously, "It is pleasant to have history epitomised for one on the spot where it has taken place. But I do not think that those noble gentlemen, in spite of their charming names, displayed much judgment in selecting a site for their city— unless, indeed, they wanted to delight the eyes of all future generations by its picturesqueness alone."

"What seems to me best worth remembering of those old Spaniards," said Margaret Langdon, "was their ardent faith. They not only saw God in all his works, but they consecrated those works to him. What a beautiful idea it was to place a church here — to dedicate this dominating height to the one influence that has power to lift men's minds and hearts above the pursuit of riches, the clash of war, the selfishness and the suffering of human life!"

As her soft voice ceased, one of those moments of silence which poetic nations call the passing of an angel, fell over the group. No one spoke — and then suddenly through the thin, clear air came the stroke of a deep bell, rising from the valley. It was the great bell of the cathedral sounding the Angelus. An instant's pause, and every bell in the city clashed out in jubilant peal until the whole air was filled with the resonant sound, softened and silvered as it rose to the height where, catching the last beams of the vanishing day, the shrine of Her whose great joy was thus told to earth and heaven answered back.

It was an exquisite moment. With serene majesty the sun had given his parting kiss to the mountain crests and gone to his golden couch where the peaks of the great Sierras lay cloud-like in the west. Colour faded out of the wide landscape, a tender, purple softness fell over valleys and hills, but the sky suddenly brightened into a glow so radiant that the little group upon the summit of the Bufa looked upward with astonished eyes. Airy, plume-like clouds of deepest rose seemed tossed upon the deep-blue heaven, and the far, faint mountains lay in dream-like masses against a sea of luminous gold. But theses dazzling splendours were brief, the colour faded as quickly as it had come, the rose clouds turned to filmy vapours of palest gray, the golden glory lessened, until Venus flashed out of its midst like a great diamond, while higher in the violet heaven hung the moon that a little later would shed over the scene a radiance as silvery and fairy-like as herself.

The air freshened perceptibly. The general buttoned his coat and said, "It is time to go." So, with a lingering glance around the wide horizon, they turned their steps downwards, where, wrapped in the shadow of its deep gorge, the terra-cotta city began to gleam with lights.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER VI.

THE VALLEY OF WARM WATERS.

A WIDE, beautiful plain, bounded by far blue hills, cultivated fields where the young grain is springing in fresh, delicious green, vineyards, meadows, and gardens forming a paradise of verdure, white level roads shaded by rows of superb trees, a dream-like glimpse of domes and spires above masses of semi-tropical foliage, a canal which contains the warm waters that give their name to the state and the city, a luminous sky and floods of sunshine — this is Aguas Calientes, distant half a day's (railroad) journey from Zacatécas, and two thousand feet lower.

"It is impossible to imagine a more striking contrast than the scene of yesterday and the scene of to-day!" said Dorothea as she looked around her. "Think of those rugged mountains, and look at this smiling plain! Are there many such contrasts to be obtained in Mexico, within a few hours of each other, Mr. Russell?"

“The table-land along which, Humboldt said, a wagon could be driven from the city of Mexico to Santa Fe, seems to be of a very up-and-down nature," said Travers. "This is like coming down from the Alps to the plains of Lombardy."

"Aguas Calientes may seem to us low after the heights of Zacatécas," said Russell; "but it has a modest elevation of more than six thousand feet."

"It has evidently a delightful climate," said the general. "This balmy air is delicious after the keen wind which we felt at Zacatécas."

"It is the Valley of Warm Waters, of healing and delight,” said Russell. “It must be one of the great health resorts of the world; but it is only one of the most charming and typical of Mexican cities."

“And this, I suppose, is a typical Mexican scene," said Mrs. Langdon, smiling as she stood still to watch the picture along the banks of the canal which contains the warm water flowing from the baths.

“It is even more typical than this," replied Russell, "when the whole population are bathing. Just now they are only washing their linen — and that of every one else, apparently."

It was indeed a thoroughly Mexican scene. The groups of women in scanty attire — for a white chemise, a coloured skirt, and the rebozo, which is bonnet and drapery in one, may be said to constitute the dress of the lower class — were gathered on the edge of the canal, washing the linen which lay beside them in piles, in the soft, warm water — their bare arms and necks gleaming in the sunshine like bronze, their long black hair streaming down their backs. With little aid of soap, they rubbed their garments energetically on a flat, smooth stone, and the result was a whiteness which could not be surpassed by any laundering process in the world.

“There was never a greater mistake than to suppose that these people are indifferent to personal cleanliness," said Russell. “Every town of any size has fine public baths; and whenever there is a stream of water available, the populace fairly revel in it. At a certain time of day all along this canal, men, women, and children may be seen taking their baths in public with a composure equal to that of surf-bathers on fashionable ocean beaches."

"You are sure that this water has come from the baths!" inquired Dorothea suspiciously.

“There is no doubt of it, I assure you. And the baths are delightful. Would you like to inspect them?"

“Just at present," said the general, "I think we had better find our hotel. Afterwards sight-seeing will be in order."

Aguas Calientes revealed itself on nearer view as a city of exceeding beauty and picturesqueness, although the picturesqueness was altogether different in kind from that of Zacatécas. Lying on its verdant plain, embowered in foliage, with lovely plazas full of plants and flowers, everywhere relieving what might else have been the monotony of its level thoroughfares, charming to the eye as these are in their miraculous cleanliness, and the vistas of softly-tinted, brightly-frescoed houses which line them, it is a place where everything seems to smile in harmony with the smiling sky, and where life is overflowing with colour and light.

“It seems an enchanting place," said Margaret Langdon; “the kind of place where one could linger for an unlimited length of time. Nature appears to have given it every charm — a perfect climate, the most bountiful production of the fruits of the earth, healing waters, and this lovely city set in the midst of orange-groves. What are the invalids and pleasure-seekers of the world about that they have not found such an ideal spot and flocked to it in multitudes?"

"Heaven grant that it may be long before they find it!” said Russell fervently. “When they do its chiefest charm will vanish, its colour and flavour will depart. After it has become a ‘resort' I shall never enter it again. But that day has not yet dawned. It is still Mexican throughout and altogether delightful."

"At the risk of exciting indignation," remarked Travers, "I must be truthful enough to say that I like this place better than Zacatécas, over which you were all so enthusiastic yesterday. Highly picturesque as Zacatécas was, we must confess that it was slightly chilly. Now, *dolce far niente* — for which I have a great weakness — is possible here. This is no place to call for energetic sight-seeing, but rather for leisurely idling, and pleasantly sunning one's self in the charming gardens that seem to abound."

“Pray be kind enough to speak for yourself," said Dorothea. “I assure you that there are some of us still equal to what you call energetic sight-seeing. I, for one—"

"Oh! that is understood, of course," interposed Mr. with great suavity. "I should never think of including you in the same category with my indolent self. Your energy, your ceaseless thirst for information, are an example to us all. But perhaps Mrs. Langdon will condescend to idle a little with me when she has nothing better to do.”

"I fancy we shall all do a good deal of idling here,*' answered Mrs. Langdon smiling. “The place seems made for it, as you say."

And indeed it followed that, despite Dorothea's intentions, there was not much sight-seeing done that day. Perhaps they were all a little tired by the amount of energy expended in Zacatécas, or perhaps the greater warmth of the atmosphere made itself felt in a sensible relaxation of spirit and muscle. It is at least certain that after dinner, at the Hotel de la Plaza, there followed a siesta so prolonged on the part of every one that the afternoon was well advanced when sharp raps from the general’s cane on their several doors brought the party together again.

Miss Graham was the last to make her appearance. "Where are we going?" she asked, with an air that seemed to imply that the slumber from which she had been torn was more attractive than any of the sights Aguas Calientes could offer.

"Well," said the general, "the most notable feature of the place must be its warm waters, since the name of the whole State is derived from them; so I think we should first visit the baths."

No one objecting, they therefore took their way to the famous waters which from remotest antiquity have gushed in steaming flood from that secret laboratory of Nature where her hidden forces are ever at work, and whence have proceeded the many marvels of this land, which seems more than other lauds a product of such forces. The finest baths are in the suburbs, and it was a pleasant journey thither by tramway; but none of the party, save Russell, were prepared for the grace and charm of the spot they found. Through a richly-carved archway of soft-red stone they passed into a spacious, quadrangular court filled with blooming plants and

Plaza of Aguas Calientes

singing birds, around which ran a broad gallery or corridor supported by sculptured pillars and arches of the same delicately-tinted stone, with doors opening upon it, and carved stone benches placed at intervals. An attendant came forward to receive them with the dignified courtesy of a grandee, and throwing wide one of the doors showed within a deep, marble-lined pool full of clear, warm water.

"What a delicious place!" said Dorothea, glancing from the limpid pool to the wealth of greenery set in the midst of the softly-toned, sculptured walls. "It is like a dream of Pompeii, or of one of Alma Tadema's pictures! Does it strike any one what a delightful thing it must be to live in a country where the most prosaic buildings are full of picturesque beauty and romantic suggestions?"

“It is only because we are strangers that the romantic suggestions occur to us," said Travers. "That is the compensation for coming from an unpicturesque and unromantic country. We should take it all as a matter of course if we lived here. I doubt if it occurred to the people of Granada that there was anything specially remarkable about the Al-hambra. But there is something classic in the appearance of this place. I wonder if the people come here to lounge and gossip, like the ancient Romans."

"I think," said Margaret Langdon, "that when I grow old and rheumatic I shall come to Aguas Calientes to live. No infirmities could resist the combined effect of this sunshine and these baths."

“If you are sure of that," said the general, "I shall elect to remain here at present, and try the effect of the climate and waters on my rheumatic leg, while the rest of you may wander over Mexico as long as you like."

"There is no need to remain here for the sake of hot baths," said Russell. “They abound all over the country."

"The temperature of these," said the general, who had meanwhile been testing it, "seems delightful. I really think I shall give myself the benefit of a bath at once."

"And shall we, like the ancient Romans, lounge and gossip here, meanwhile?" inquired Miss Graham.

“That is not necessary,” said Russell. "Let us leave the general to his plunge and go ourselves to the garden of San Marcos. When he is ready he will find us there."

“Find *you*,” said the general. “Yes, that may be easy enough; hut how am I to find the garden?"

"That is easy enough, also," replied Russell. And explicit directions having been given to that effect, the general vanished behind a closed door, while the others, deferring this practical test of the waters to another time, set forth for the pleasure- ground of which Russell had spoken.

It is a beautiful place, this Jardin de San Marcos, and beautifully kept, as all public gardens are in Mexico. Unceasing is the labour, the attention, and the watering lavished on these spots. During the hours when the hose are sending crystal showers over banks of flowers, stretches of turf, trees, and shrubs, the whole air is laden with moisture; and it is not wonderful that the growth and luxuriance of everything is magical, since water is the one thing necessary in Mexico to make a desert blossom into a garden. Seated around a fountain embowered with roses, the strangers looked on such a scene as they had not yet witnessed — a picture of tropical verdure. Wherever the glance fell it rested on masses of Nile lilies, geraniums, azaleas, and oleanders. The air was filled with the fragrance of orange-blossoms, and the sweet, pervading odour of violets blooming in myriads everywhere; yet soft, warm, perfumed as it was, it contained no relaxing quality, but was full of stimulating freshness. And the charm of the visible atmosphere — how can words describe that? Painting alone can give the exquisite tints and tones of Mexican atmospheric effects, of the skies that bend over this lovely land elevated so high towards heaven, of the celestial robes that its mountains wear, of the exquisite distances of its wide plains set with cities that lift their slender campaniles above walls of pale pink and soft amber, half-buried in masses of feathery foliage.

"I should really think," said Dorothea, “that the abounding natural beauty of this country might almost set an artist wild! And yet how few can have visited it, for I do not think I ever saw a Mexican scene in any gallery or exhibition of art."

"Artistically it has yet to be revealed to the world," said Russell. "But it is now so accessible, and offers such inducements to the health and pleasure seeker, that I fear it will soon be flooded with tourists — and its peculiar charm in great measure thus be lost."

“I am glad that we have come with the advance guard," said Travers, leaning back and regarding the soft mass of domes and towers against the luminous sky, where the warm rose-flush of evening became visible, as the sun sank towards the distant line of mountains, and the wide plain seemed swimming in amber light. "But, after all, no flood of tourists can take away this, you know," he added in a reflective and somewhat consoling tone. "They can't well darken the sky or turn these beautiful minarets and towers into conventional spires and pressed-brick fronts. So, let us be philosophical — especially as there are none of them here at present — and delve a little into the history of Aguas Calientes. Who founded it, Russell?"

“Our friend of Zacatécas — Cristobal de Onate — immediately after the conquest," replied Russell. “He went to Zacatécas when the great silver lodes were discovered; but I am sure he must have needed all the inducement of the silver to exchange this delightful plain for those bare, brown heights. I have no doubt he returned here often in the intervals of amassing his fortune."

"Good heavens," said Travers, with an energy so unexpected that it startled his companions, "what opportunities those old conquistadores had! There is nothing like it in the history of the world; no fabled El Dorado ever equalled the reality of Mexico. New Spain! What pictures the very name conjures up to the imagination, of marvellous adventure, of wealth surpassing that of the Indies, of a land abounding in wonders, of picturesque beauty and untold possibilities! How poor the world has grown since we have explored every nook and corner of it, and there is never another Mexico to be discovered, look where we will!"

“But there is much yet to be discovered— at least by our race — in this old land," said Russell. “It is a country which needs and will repay long and patient study. But in order to discover its interest several things are necessary. First, a knowledge of the history of this people, so underrated, so little understood by the world at large; a comprehension of the forces which have combined to make them what they are, a sympathetic appreciation of their standards and ideas, and a freedom from narrow prejudice."

"In short," said Mrs. Langdon, "you want the ideal traveller, who possesses comprehensive knowledge, wide culture, and, above all, the quick, poetic sympathy to which 'nothing that is human is strange.' But you must remember that such travellers do not abound anywhere."

“I think they have been fewer in Mexico than elsewhere," said Russell. “Otherwise, would so many misconceptions of this country be abroad?"

“We have agreed,” said Margaret, "that it is very hard for people of alien traditions, habits, manners, and customs to understand each other. By much culture we are only slowly approaching that point; but we *are* approaching it. Your ideal travellers will arrive after a while, Mr. Russell."

"It strikes me," observed Travers, “that one or two have already arrived. Modesty forbids me to be more particular in designation."

“I wonder," said Miss Graham, suddenly and irrelevantly, "if one would be allowed to gather some of these violets? There are so many, and they are so deliciously fragrant."

"I will find out," said Russell. He rose and walked to where a man was at work in the flower-beds. A few words were exchanged, they saw the ready courtesy with which the request was acceded to, and then down on his knees went the Mexican, and began gathering violets among the thick green leaves.

“Oh, let me gather some!" cried Miss Graham, rising with graceful impetuosity. The Mexican lifted his dark-lashed eyes and smiled at the pretty face that suddenly appeared opposite him bending over the border. He held out a fragrant cluster of the delicate purple flowers, and then went on gathering more, his slender brown hands pushing aside the leaves with a rapidity that made assistance unnecessary, although Russell also stooped down and lent his aid.

"Shall we likewise go and assist?" asked Travers of his companions. “Or do you agree with me that it is preferable to purchase violets that somebody else has had the trouble of gathering?"

"I think the supply of violets yonder will soon exceed the demand," replied Mrs. Langdon.

The gardener was apparently of the same opinion. He rose to his feet, walked over to the other ladies, and offered his violets with a grace as charming as the smile that accompanied it, while he declined by a gesture the coin which Travers made haste to offer him.

"What did I tell you?" said that gentleman. "'All things come to him who knows how to wait' — although in this instance no violets have yet come to me."

“Miss Graham, perhaps, will gather some for you," said Mrs. Langdon laughing. "With the gardener's eye upon me, I cannot think of giving you any of these."

“If Miss Graham has any violets to spare they will be given to Russell. I can fancy her telling him that they are her ‘own particular flower,' and therefore she never gives them except as a special mark of her favour. There was a time when they were given to me — but that time is no longer. If Miss Dorothea will not take compassion on me, I clearly foresee that I shall have to go and gather some violets for myself."

“A little exertion would be very good for you, I am sure," said Dorothea, as she fastened her violets in her girdle. “But, since you are so averse to anything of the kind, Violet will probably give you some of her own particular flowers in return for the covert sneers you are constantly levelling at her."

"Now I call heaven and earth — no, I call Mrs. Langdon — to witness if I have ever been guilty of levelling covert sneers at Miss Graham!" Travers cried. “In the first place, I should despair of their being comprehended, and, in the second place, I should have before my eyes the fear of being summarily requested by yourself to retrace my steps to New Orleans."

“A request to which you would probably pay as much heed as to my suggestion that you might not form an altogether harmonious member of the party," said Dorothea with asperity.

“I flatter myself," he replied, with the unruffled calmness which always irritated her, "that my judgment has in that respect proved more correct than your own. Let us ask Mrs. Langdon to say frankly if I have, up to this time, proved an inharmonious element."

"Margaret's opinion is of no value at all," said Dorothea, “She would fear to hurt the feelings of a fly by saying that it annoyed her."

"And do I represent the fly? How flattering to my self-love! Was I not right in saying that there would not be very much of that left by the time we recrossed the Rio Grande?"

“When are you not right?" inquired Dorothea with unkind sarcasm. “I am sure that no proof of your own infallibility of judgment can strike you as remarkable."

“If so, I should be struck by the fact that yonder is one slight proof of it, to which I beg to call your attention," he said, and with a glance he indicated a scene taking place at that moment. Miss Graham, her hands full of violets, had risen from the border, and was fastening a portion of her fragrant spoils on Russell's coat, the while lifting her eyes to his face in the swift glances that were accustomed to do much execution, or dropping them so that the long lashes lay on her clear, white cheeks.

“I perceive nothing," said Dorothea coldly, "except that Violet is very naturally giving Mr. Russell some of the flowers he helped to gather."

"You don't remember a scouted prophecy of mine in New Orleans, and you don't see the signs of any fulfilment of it? *Eh bien*! He who waits will see what he shall see. The fair Violet has been under a cloud since our departure, overwhelmed by too much artistic and historical enthusiasm. But she is beginning to recover herself. I perceive encouraging signs that our siren of the Mississippi will soon be herself again. Ah, here comes the general! He has found both the garden and us."

"Beautiful place this!" said the general, coming up full of enthusiasm. “I never saw lovelier— What, violets?”

This to Miss Graham, who approached him at the moment. “Certainly, my dear; certainly. I shall he delighted to have some, especially when gathered by such fair hands."

"They are my own particular flowers, you know," said the young lady with a bewitching smile, “and I like all my friends to wear my colours."

So it came to pass that Mr. Travers was the only undecorated member of the party when they finally left the garden, saying that they would return to the charming spot the next day and enjoy it afresh.

But the next day there was much else to see and to do. Beautiful old churches, with richly sculptured doorways, tempted to long lingering in their picturesque interiors, filled with the mellow harmonies of faded frescoes and the gilded carving of ancient altars. In several they found fine old paintings, notably two by Ibarra in San Marcos — a "St. Mark” and an “Adoration of the Kings” — which were not only worthy of attention, but which they might easily have failed to see. For, hidden away in dark chapels and sacristies all over Mexico are treasures of art which no eager sacristan, as in Italy, brings to the notice of the stranger. They must be carefully sought for if they would be seen, and in many cases the art-loving visitor will be astonished to find the unmistakable traces of a master's brush on pictures to which no one has thought of directing his attention. Many are the works of the great school of Spanish painters that found their way to the churches, monasteries, and convents of this opulent country. Bought for devotional purposes, they still serve those purposes, save when the government has confiscated and transferred them to its schools of art. The number so transferred, however, is small compared

with the number that still remain in the rich, dim old churches, where they were placed centuries ago.

Coming out of one of the most quaint and interesting of these ancient edifices, the lofty arch of its elaborately carved doorway almost hidden by tall, graceful palms, while a wealth of roses rioted below, they found themselves close upon the market-place, where columned arcades enclose on four sides an open square in which all the colour of a tropical land seems to meet and overflow. Shaded from the sun by squares of matting supported on slender poles, the venders of fruit and vegetables sit, surrounded by their luscious wares. Oranges, cherimoyas, aguacates, the purple fruit of the cactus, the melon-sepota, granaditas and limes, with many others, of which even Russell hardly knew the names, made masses as attractive to the eye as to the palate, while the mounds of vegetables were hardly less brilliant in their hues, and of variety too great for enumeration. In the midst of this wealth of product moved, sat, talked, chaffered the graceful picturesque people, forming on all sides groups for a painter, the shadowy coolness of the arcaded *portales* affording an effective background, and the splendour of the sky above accentuating every tint of colour below.

"Oh, to be an artist!" sighed Dorothea. "No one else should come here. It makes one long for a colour-box, a canvas, and an easel. There is no other way to represent such a scene as this."

"A camera, perhaps," suggested the general.

"A camera, no. How can that give the wealth of colour, the golden-bronze of the people's skins, the exquisite tints of the old stone buildings, the luminous shadows like a Velasquez picture?"

“It was certainly an oversight not to have added an artist to our party," said Travers. "But then, you see, the party itself is an entirely fortuitous concourse of atoms."

"Here is some of the pottery of this place," said Russell, walking over to a pile of the ware in question displayed under one of the arches. "These vessels," he went on, "are in universal use throughout Mexico for almost all household purposes — the poorer classes use nothing else. But there is a great difference in the quality of the ware manufactured in different places. Every district has its own variety, some of which is of much higher excellence than others."

“That which we saw in Zacatécas was different from this," said Mrs. Langdon. “It seemed more durable though coarser, and had a very hard and brilliant glaze."

“The Aguas Calientes ware is of a better grade," said Russell. “Some of it is really beautiful, with a classic grace of form, and genuine artistic feeling displayed in the decoration. See this jar, with its yellow, transparent glaze and the graceful design of red flowers and leaves splashed over it!"

"It is really remarkable," said the general. "Is there a manufactory of this pottery?"

“No," answered Russell. "There is no such thing in Mexico. It is all made by the Indians without any direction of educated talent. They have their own peculiar art of making it, an art handed down from father to son. Think of the artistic genius it evinces!"

“They have true artistic hands," said Margaret Langdon, looking at the slim, brown fingers of the man who was showing his wares to them. “Of course, you know how much character there is in the hand. There is no part of the human body more expressive, and the hands of these people have struck me from the first. I do not wonder that they can mould clay into such

forms, and decorate it with so true a sense of colour and harmony. It is all written there in those slender, tapering, flexible fingers."

So, through the picturesque sights and ways of the lovely, sunshine-flooded, colour-adorned city they wandered, drinking deeper at every step the fascinations of this land, where the charms of all those other lands which the world has agreed to be most enchanting seem to meet and blend. But it was in the evening, whilst they were still lingering over that nondescript meal which in Mexican hotels may be called either dinner or supper, that a burst of music from the plaza near by called them forth to the most typical of all Mexican scenes.

It was a scene which to their unaccustomed eyes appeared gay and brilliant in the extreme. A military band was playing in a pavilion lighted by hanging lamps and embowered in foliage, whilst a throng of people, belonging to the higher classes, promenaded in two processions (one composed of men, the other of ladies) around the broad paved walk that encircled the plaza. On benches under the glossy boughs of orange-trees, shining in the lamp-light and laden with golden fruit and odorous blossoms, numbers of people were sitting, talking in low, well-bred tones, children were playing and laughing along the wide walks that passed through the garden which formed the centre of the square, and the whole picture was so bright, animated, joyous, yet full of decorum and in a manner of stately grace, that it seemed to the strangers less like reality than like a page from an old romance.

"But what a pity," cried Dorothea, "that the crowning touch of picturesqueness is gone, that these Spanish-looking women have abandoned their mantillas, to wear bonnets and hats! If I were one of them how glad I should be to cling to anything so artistic and becoming as the lovely drapery of Spain!"

"They have not abandoned the mantilla by any means," said Russell, "but they reserve it for occasions of which a promenade like this is not one."

"The scene would, of course, be much more characteristic if they wore the Spanish mantilla, which I take to be a drapery of black lace," said Travers. "But I must say I think the hats are preferable to the black shawls in which we have seen them going in and out of the churches all day, and which make every woman look like a nun."

"Well," said the general, who meanwhile had been carefully scanning the passing throng— especially the maidens with their delicate features, their dark, liquid eyes, their dusky masses of rippling hair, their lithe, rounded forms, proud carriage, and springing step — "you may criticise the head covering as much as you like, but there is little to criticise in the faces."

"And less in the manners," said Mrs. Langdon. “This is of course, an indiscriminate gathering, for all these people cannot be drawn from one order of society, yet how striking is the absence of anything like vulgarity of manner — loud speech, boisterous laughter, or unrestrained gesture!"

Garden of San Marcos, Aguas Calientes

“You might wander through every plaza in Mexico without finding a trace of those things," said Russell. "Remark the dignity of those girls and their entire lack of self-consciousness. If they ever exchange the coquettish, alluring glances of which one reads in certain romances of travel with the men passing them, I can only say that during my long residence in the country I have never yet detected one such glance."

“Oh! from the days of Marco Polo to our own travellers have found it necessary to embroider facts with fictions," said Travers. "I confess that I have so far looked in vain for some of the romantic episodes which have immediately rewarded the observation of other tourists. In the churches I have seen no lady talking with her fan to the cavalier behind the pillar. They all appear to be prosaically and devoutly engaged in saying their prayers; and I am beginning to be afraid that these picturesque bits of comedy only occur in novels and books of travels."

"No Mexican lady ever carries a fan to church," said Russell. “Etiquette prescribes precisely the use of that article. It is part of her costume for a ball, theatre, or opera, but is never taken to church; so spare yourself the trouble of looking any more for such episodes."

“None of you have yet mentioned what strikes me most of all here," said Dorothea — "that, perfect as the manners of these people are, they are in no respect better than those of the peasants we saw to-day in the market-place; which proves — what does it prove, Mr. Russell?"

"That the Mexican possesses by nature what it costs some other races a great deal of trouble to acquire — that is, a fine appreciation of the best in that admirable thing which we call manners," answered Russell.

"What strikes me," said Miss Graham, “is that here is something very different from market-places filled with peasants. These are the best people — one sees it at a glance. This is society."

"Evidently," replied Travers with gravity. "The *beau-monde* of Aguas Calientes is here in force. Shall we, by the bye, join in their dress-parade?"

"Oh! I think so," replied Miss Graham eagerly, who had no mind to conceal her beautiful face and faultless toilette in the corner of a shaded bench. "It is certainly the thing to do — don't you think so?" appealing to Mrs. Langdon.

"Yes, Margaret," said the general. "Let us take a turn. I observe that men are allowed in the feminine ranks when they accompany ladies."

Margaret, always compliant to the wishes of others, smiled assent, and rising moved forward to fall into the ranks of the promenaders. Miss Graham rose also, and, after one appealing but unheeded glance at Russell, Travers took his place by her side. "Shall we follow them?" Russell then inquired of Dorothea.

"No," she answered, "let us remain here. I like better to watch the people than to join them."

"In that case, and since we are in Mexico, will you allow me to light a cigar? If I change my seat to your other side the breeze will carry the smoke from you."

"Do not disturb yourself," she answered. “I never object to the smoke of a cigar in the open air. And just now I shall like it particularly, because it will put you in a good humour to answer all my questions."

He laughed as he struck a match and lighted his cigar. "The bribe is unnecessary," he said, "for I am always glad to tell you anything that you wish to know."

"What a delightful person you are!" she said, with naive frankness. "I never expected to find a travelling companion so entirely after my own heart. I know I am very troublesome in what Mr. Travers calls my insatiate thirst for information; but it is not only the things you tell that I enjoy, it is your way of telling them, your readiness, your—"

He lifted his hand in protest. "Take care!" he said smiling. "You talk of your heart — have you no thought that mine, however time-hardened and battered, might prove vulnerable to such flattery?"

"But it is not flattery," she answered earnestly. "It is sober truth. As I was saying to Margaret last night, it is simply wonderful that you can take so much interest in guiding and making things pleasant for us."

“And do you not suppose that I am also making them pleasant for myself?" he asked. “Don't credit me with too much unselfishness. In point of fact, I am as selfish as most men, for I assure you that nothing would induce me to unite my travelling fortunes with those of people whose society was not agreeable to me. But I am really the person most obliged. You see I have led such a wandering life for many years that I am a very lonely man, as far as the intimate ties of life are concerned. I have hosts of acquaintances all over the world, but very few friends. And no later friendships can take the place of those associated with the memories of one's youth. So I enjoy the companionship of your father, your sister, and yourself — and I must include Travers, who is a very good fellow, though I am afraid you don't believe it — more than I could possibly enjoy that of people equally agreeable who had not the charm of old association. And this being

so, pray let me hear no more of any obligation to me for the little service I am able to render you."

She gave him a smile that said more than words, and then they fell to talking of the scene before them, while the band made the air resonant with throbbing, joyous music, so marked in its time that it was no wonder the small, daintily-shod feet passing by kept step to the cadences with soldierly precision; the great stars looked down out of a violet sky, the air was like a sensible caress, and a light passing breeze came laden with all the blossoming fragrance of the night, as night is in this delightful Valley of Warm Waters.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER VII.

THE CITY OF THE ARGENTINE HILLS.

MORNING, which is ever in Mexico like a new creation of the earth, broke in resplendent beauty over the wide plain that surrounds Silao. The sun leaped from a couch of dazzling glory and spread his mantle of gold over the far-stretching expanse of the plateau, over the purple heights draped in soft mists of morning, over the lovely towers and shining domes of the town, and over the party that wended their way, followed by two porters laden with the impedimenta of travel, across the broad open space that lies between the hotel where they spent the night and the railway station whither they were bound.

Around the station were the booths of the venders of all manner of eatables, the usual throng of peddlers and beggars and squads of soldiers, for the military arm, which is strongly in evidence everywhere in Mexico, is nowhere more so than in Silao, which had once an unenviable reputation as a haunt of outlaws and bandits, and between which and Guanajuato, the rich mining city of the mountains beyond, runs a train that, carrying much bullion, is always guarded by a strong military escort.

It was seated in this train, half an hour later, that the travellers turned their faces towards the city, which Russell assured them was the most picturesque in Mexico and one of the most picturesque in the world, as it sits high on its great hill, the name of which in the Tarascan tongue signifies the Hill of the Frog, because here in ancient times the Tarascan Indians found a stone in the shape of a frog which they worshipped. Other men in later times have found here other stones which they worship with a no less ardent devotion — for famous among all the mines of Mexico stand the mines of Guanajuato.

As they moved off, passing in a great curve around Silao, they had a charming view of the town as it lay in the sunshine of early morning, its long, white walls encircling masses of feathery foliage, above which the slender, graceful minarets of its churches rose in the sparkling

air. Then, in the golden light that was making all the wide scene glorious, they sped across the level plain, green with its springing harvests, towards the massive heights that seemed as if they must bar all progress to the city that lay beyond. Their car was well filled with passengers of many and varied types. Grave, stately Mexican gentlemen; eager, restless, talkative Americans, discussing mines, intent upon speculations and investments; tourists of different nationalities, and groups of dark-eyed señoritas. The general, glancing around, remarked that the train for a local one seemed to be well filled.

"It is always well filled," said Russell. "Guanajuato is a very rich and important place—the greatest mining centre in Mexico."

"And like Zacatécas, I suppose, it owes its existence to the mines," said Mrs. Langdon, looking at the mountains which began to reveal themselves in their ruggedness as the train approached.

"Undoubtedly," replied Travers. "Our guide-book says: 'The site of this city, with much surrounding land in what was a very barren place, was given by the Viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza to Don Rodrigo Vazquez, one of the *conquistadores*, in recompense for his services in helping to win for his royal master the rich country of New Spain.' If silver was not discovered at that time," said the reader, interrupting himself, "Don Rodrigo could not have felt that his services were very well recompensed. But when silver was discovered of course the aspect of things materially changed — which contains a moral that I need not elaborate. Silver was found, we are told, in 1548. It would be interesting to know how much the mines have produced from that time to this."

"An immense total," said Russell. "One mine alone — the Valenciana — produced in one year more than all the mines of Peru. Its yield up to the present time is estimated to have been eight hundred millions."

"Can one see that mine?" asked the general.

"You not only can but must— it will interest you in every way. And I think the ladies will also be interested in seeing it."

"We must take your word for that," said Dorothea a little sceptically. "Meanwhile here we are among the mountains. Has any one observed what a fine highway runs parallel with our track, and what picturesque groups of people and burros we are passing?"

"The highway ought to be fine," remarked Travers. "We are told that it was nearly a hundred years in building. As for the burros, they plainly indicate that all the freight of the country does not go by rail."

Troops of these small, patient animals were indeed passing along the road, laden with produce of all kinds; herdsmen came riding by with coiled lassoes at their pommels; the brown hills closed nearer; on their sides sheep and goats were nibbling scanty herbage; the highway swept over an arched stone bridge, where graceful trees drooped along the verge of the little stream that fretted over the rocks below, while from their slackened speed it was evident that the train was mounting a heavy grade. Higher and higher they climbed, rounding the abrupt and massive heights that seemed pressing forward to guard the way, and presently paused in a small valley at the mouth of a narrow, rocky pass.

“This is Marfil," said Russell, as every one rose with a simultaneous movement. "We go from here to Guanajuato — about three miles — by tramway. The *cañada* into which we enter is too narrow to admit of a railroad track."

Tram-cars, drawn by lively, able-bodied mules, awaited the passengers, who filled them speedily. They were soon in motion, and what Dorothea saw from the platform where she insisted upon standing, very much to the surprise and concern of various courteous Mexicans, was a narrow, winding defile between great precipitous heights, containing barely room enough for the highway (along one side of which the tramway was laid), and a very small stream carefully walled in its rocky bed. As for the town of Marfil, it clung, perched, hung, sometimes it seemed by grappling-hooks, to the almost perpendicular mountain-sides —the heavy, Moorish houses, built with a solidity equal to that of the rocks on which they rested, looking as if nothing short of a convulsion of Nature could detach them from their positions. In a nook of the closely enfolding heights stood the parish church, a Byzantine-like chapel of pink stone crowned a brown hill, and along the stream a succession of reduction works, enclosed in strong, bastioned walls, rose like forts.

“They look as if they were built to stand a siege!" said Dorothea.

“So they were," answered Russell. "Many has been the siege these mines have stood in times past. They have been sacked again and again. No city in Mexico has a more thrilling and bloody history than Guanajuato. Its riches have tempted the cupidity of armies as well as of banditti, and it has been plundered until its recuperation proves more conclusively than anything else the immense resources of its mines."

"I am afraid you do not pay much attention to the information which I take pains to draw from Mr. Janvier's pages and give you," said Travers. "It has not been long since I told you that the first settlement here was a fort at the place now called Marfil, erected by some Spanish adventurers to secure the silver they obtained from the mines. A little later the existing city was founded under the truly formidable name of the Villa y Real de Minas de Santa Fé de Guanajuato."

"The situation of the city must be as formidable as its name," said Dorothea, observing that, although the town of Marfil had now been left behind, they were still mounting upwards and upwards along the narrow pass, winding sharply around the rocky escarpments that appeared at times almost to close the way, with the great mountains frowning over them, and the little river, which in the rainy season is a roaring flood, flowing within its walled bed beside them. "One might be approaching a citadel, but a city—"

"It is a citadel and city in one," said Russell. "This defile is its only outlet. It leads like a gateway to Guanajuato, which lies in a high, irregular basin, completely encircled by mountains. Ah!" — as they dashed around another sharp curve — "here we are at the gates!"

A short pause, and then the tram-car began to wind its way into a city which seemed a dream of mediaeval Europe and the Orient mingled, as it lay like a brilliant jewel in the midst of its rugged fastnesses, the amphitheatre of brown mountains which surround it framing the mass of glowing and varied colour that its houses, castles, and churches present. A sea-shell-pink is perhaps the pervading tone of colour, with many soft tints of amber and a malachite green, which is the hue of the beautifully variegated stone used largely for building. The deep, cup-shaped valley in which the town lies, affords hardly any level space; and the streets, therefore, climb

upwards — sometimes by stairways— in all directions, run along the terraced mountain-sides, where the massive dwellings stand tier above tier and turn zigzag in a multiplicity of irregular ways. Advancing farther into the heart of this unique city, what pictures reveal themselves on all sides! Softly-tinted houses with balconies of sculptured stone and glimpses through open archways of courts, like a vision of Granada, with their slender pillars and graceful springing arches, their flowers and fountains and delicately frescoed walls; tiled domes iridescent as a peacock's neck; towers rich with carving that look like a lace work of stone against the dazzling azure of the sky; and everywhere a throng of brightly-dressed people, of ladened burros, of picturesque artisans working in the doors of their small, dark shops, of splendidly mounted cavaliers — in short, all the varied life and activity of a busy and prosperous city.

Passing through these glowing scenes, the car at length gained the Plaza de Mejia Mora — a small square set like an emerald in the midst of the many-tinted surroundings — and paused to allow its passengers to descend.

The greenness and beauty of this lovely spot was an unexpected pleasure to the eye, and after engaging rooms in the hotel that looked down upon its trees and shaded walks, the party set forth to enjoy the most enchanting sight-seeing they had yet known.

How can one hope to describe the scenes through which they wandered? Save in the hands of a consummate artist, words are poor instruments with which to paint such combinations of form and colour as meet the gaze on every side as the feet pass through the winding ways of Guanajuato. The wealth drawn from the bosom of its great silver-bearing heights has found expression in the Moresque houses, rich with sculpture; in their exquisite courts and gardens, and in the splendid churches and public edifices; but there is not a foot of its twisting, irregular streets that is not richer still in lovely artistic effect, in vistas so full of vivid picturesqueness, as they climb upwards towards the sky or lead downwards to lower levels, that one can only pause to paint the scenes upon one's memory, and ask one's self by what spell this perfect mediaeval city has been preserved untouched and unspoiled, to gladden one's eyes with its delightful beauty in the midst of the ugliness of the nineteenth century.

Up and down, among the bewildering network of streets, loitering under great archways, pausing for some vision of arcaded coolness wandering through the market-places where colour seemed running riot, or climbing the platforms that lead to the great churches, the little group found everywhere fresh food for their enthusiasm and delight. It was Dorothea who stopped once and pointed over the intervening balustraded roofs to a superb tower of sculptured stone, thrown out against the deep-blue sky. "Let us find that church," she said. "It must be worth seeing."

"That is the Compañía," said Russell. "As the name indicates, it is a Jesuit foundation. Confiscated, of course — but the church has been spared for religious use, although the great community house is occupied as a barracks or something of the kind."

"Confiscation is a very economical business — for the government," said the general in a sarcastic tone. “It saves the expense of erecting any building for public purposes. I have yet to see the first that has not been stolen from some religious order. What an infernal set of robbers— "

"Papa!"

"I use the term advisedly, my dear. I repeat, what an infernal set of robbers this country seems to have been cursed with ever since it set up a government of its own!"

“Such robbers," said Russell, “that it is wonderful any rights of property remain untouched, and that the people as a whole have been so little demoralised."

Not less than eighty thousand dollars were spent in blasting out the level space upon which the splendid mass of the Compañía stands — a fact that will give some idea of the difficulties which have attended building in Guanajuato. Looking up at the great church proudly seated on its elevated platform, as one mounts the street leading to it, one has a sight as beautiful as it is imposing. Built of a pink stone which stands in exquisite contrast against brown mountain and sapphire sky, its richly decorated front is covered with elaborate sculpture. Over the central doorway stands the figure of the founder of the "all-conquering Company," other Jesuit saints fill the other niches, Faith, Hope, and Charity look down, the noble tower, rich in carving, rises above, and so far back that it looks as if it belonged to another building, the sunlight catches the gleaming tiles of the great dome.

Within something of disappointment awaited them. There can be no finer space and proportion than that which meets the eye on entering, but the interior was undergoing repairs which, from the nature of the work in progress, could not but be of long duration. In the apse of the sanctuary they found great blocks of stone on which the sculptors were at work in a faithful, artistic fashion beyond praise. There was nothing of pretence here. Every stroke of the chisel was guided by an eye trained to artistic perception, every wrought column was solid and firm, every arch as perfect in workmanship as in symmetry. They lingered long — interested in the work, admiring the result, questioning the men who were so courteously ready to answer, and whose delicate faces, lithe forms, and slender brown hands were so attractive to the eye.

Here also they found some fine old paintings, and when they presently emerged from the vast church — founded on a rock, and rock-like in its splendid durability — into the narrow, picturesque street winding by, their attention was at once arrested by the great mass of another noble sanctuary.

"That is la *parróquia*— the parish church," said Russell. "It is generally taken by strangers for a cathedral, but Guanajuato is not the seat of a bishop."

La *parróquia* is a very beautiful old church, as it, too, stands on its *lonja*, or high platform, above the streets that run up and down around it. This platform is surrounded by a twisted iron railing with stone pillars surmounted by curious urns and crosses, and approached by a sweeping flight of semi-circular stone steps. On these steps a beggar sits and holds out a withered brown hand for the alms which he asks *por amor de Dios*; a vender of pottery has established herself with all her wares around her, the graceful vessels with their glazed surface and decoration in brilliant tints making a mass of lovely colour against the grey background of stone. The great doors of the church stand open. And here as elsewhere the interior is so nobly conceived, the wide nave has such space, the arched roof such splendid height and upward sweep, that one loses sight of any unsatisfactory details in the beautiful effect of the whole, which is rich in carving and a gilding that has faded with time only enough to be harmonious, in soft lights and deep picturesque shadows, and above all in the sense of a peace so exalted that it falls like a touch of balm on the spirit. As through the ever-open portals figures come and go, gliding noiselessly across the floor, kneeling before shrines where beautiful old lamps of rare design have burned for ages, one feels how truly this church, and all like it throughout the land, has proved a sanctuary in the old mediaeval sense — a spot where, through the terrible stress of war,

the horror of revolution, the oppression and misrule, the spoliation, poverty and suffering, the people have come to lay down their burdens of anguish for a little while, to find a place of refuge from the racking torture of life, and to gather courage to endure with calm and steadfast patience unto the end. Such calmness, such pathetic patience one reads on many of these faces now, as they are seen for an instant in the shade of the great doorways before passing out to the dazzling world of light and colour beyond.

It was a very dazzling world to the eyes of the group who presently left the cool, shadowy church, its dusky chapels and the richly decorated shrine where Nuestra Señora de Guanajuato stands, surrounded by lamps that have never ceased to burn in her honour since that distant day when Philip Second sent the little statue over sea and land as his gift to Guanajuato, and emerged into the outer sunlight. A charming little plaza, also elevated above the street and reached by flights of steps, is opposite the church. Here they went, to rest a little, to watch the throng of people passing constantly along the busy thoroughfares, and to decide what they should see and do next.

It was several hours later that they found themselves in what they unanimously declared to be the most charming spot they had yet seen. And indeed no one who has beheld the Presa de la ol1a of Guanajuato will be likely to deny that it is one of the most charming spots to be possibly seen anywhere. The valley in which the city lies widens a little at this its upper end, and here a stream of considerable size descending from the mountains has been confined in a succession of reservoirs built one below the other in a series of basins limpid, rock-lined, overhung on one side by beautiful gardens and picturesque residences, bordered on the other by the road that winds up the gorge, which is also lined by handsome homes, while the great mountains rise abruptly into towering heights on each hand and enhance by contrast the fairy-like aspect of the scene. Broad paths lead over the massive dams that confine the waters, to the verdure-embowered houses that occupy the narrow space between the reservoirs and the precipitous cliffs, their graceful arcades, frescoed in soft, lovely colours, reflected with almost startling distinctness in the mirror-like surface of the lakelets, together with the abundant deep-green foliage and gorgeously flowering shrubs that surround them.

“Could anything be more exquisite!” cried Dorothea, pausing to contemplate one of these pictures — a vision of delicately painted arches almost hidden by overhanging vines and trees, birds singing in gilded cages, a tree laden with scarlet blossoms bending over the glassy surface of the water, a peacock displaying his magnificent tail on a low rock wall.

“They are pretty places," said the general, "but they give me an uncomfortable idea of dampness. Standing immediately on the water, with that mountain, like a wall, behind them, they are exceedingly suggestive of rheumatism."

“Oh, papa, how dreadfully prosaic!" said Dorothea with a laugh. “They seem to me enchanting — *casas de recreo* in the fullest sense, suggestive of all manner of fancies as charming as themselves."

"They certainly do not suggest much of the serious business of life," observed Travers. “One can hardly imagine one's self doing anything in such a habitation except listening to a lady playing on a lute — and perhaps making love to her between whiles."

"How very tiresome to the lady that would be!" said Miss Graham with an air of innocent malice.

So talking, they walked slowly up the winding roadway until they reached the end of the ascending gorge, where a plaza has been laid out in a garden full of flowers and all manner of tropical plants. Beyond and above it the great brown heights close like a wall, below the necklace of crystal lakes drops down in the midst of greenery, to the city glowing with sea-shell colour, that lies in the heart of its deep valley and on the steep acclivities of its encircling hills.

"It is an entrancing place altogether," said Dorothea with a soft sigh of pleasure, “One could spend a long time here without wearying. And now, Mr. Russell, where shall we go next?"

"Tell us. Russell." said Mr. Travers with an air of resignation. "Don't keep us in suspense. Miss Graham looks pale with anxiety to know what exertion will next be required of her. '"

“Well," said Russell tentatively, “yonder is the Cerro de San Miguel. How would you like to climb up there, inspect the fort, and take in a fine view of Guanajuato?”

"Admirable!" exclaimed Dorothea— but it was evident that the rest of the party were not inclined to attempt the ascent of the great hill upon which they could see the frowning bastioned walls of the Fort of the Archangel. There was a moment’s silence, and then Mrs. Langdon said:

“I suppose Dorothea will regard us very contemptuously, but 1 think I express the sentiments of the majority when I ask, can you not suggest something a little more accessible?"

“Oh, yes!" replied Russell. "There is the Alhóndiga de Granaditas. so famous in the blood-stained annals of the place, which you have not yet seen. It is very accessible, being in the heart of the city."

“The Alhóndiga! — we must on no account overlook that," said the general. "It seems to be the most interesting historical object in Guanajuato. I was reading last night a description of the siege it stood when the city was captured by the revolutionists under Hidalgo, and again when retaken by the Spaniards. There is nothing in history to surpass the horrors of either siege— but especially of the first."

"I, too, was reading that description the other day," said Mrs. Langdon: "and the wholesale slaughter that followed the capture of the citadel by Hidalgo's forces was so horrible that I do not wonder the Spaniards sent his head to ornament a spike on the building, when they captured him. Remembering all the excesses he committed, I can feel no interest in his career, nor pity for his fate."

"In extenuation, one should recollect that his army was only an undisciplined mob of half-civilised Indians, very difficult to restrain," said Russell. “Only success, with its accompaniments of bloodshed and plunder, kept the mass of them with him. You know, after his final defeat near Guadalajara, they melted away like the mists of morning."

"He had the power, or at least he might have manifested the will, to show some mercy to the Spanish garrison who had held the Alhóndiga with so much courage,” said the general; "but they were butchered to the last man."

"The vengeance which the Spaniards took on Guanajuato was terrific," said Russell. “We are told that its streets literally ran with blood. But these are gruesome memories for such bright scenes. Shall we go and see the Alhóndiga? It is the city prison now, you know."

“I observe in the guide-book," said Travers, "a very sensible remark to the effect that ‘in a Mexican prison are many creeping and hopping things which creep and hop from the unjust prisoners to the just visitors with most undesirable celerity.' So I think that I shall be satisfied with viewing the exterior of this famous building."

"I am sorry for any one," remarked Dorothea loftily, "who in the midst of great historical associations, in a place where human endurance and human heroism have been displayed to their utmost limit, can think of anything so small as—"

“Creeping and hopping things?" asked her sister with a smile. "But although small, they are more to be dreaded than many much larger things; so I am inclined to decide also for the outside of the building. What do you say, Violet?"

"There is really little to be seen inside," said Russell. "The historical associations can be appreciated as well without as within, and the building is only worth entering for the view from the roof. That is very fine."

"Then," said Dorothea with decision, “I, for one, shall certainly see it, be the consequences what they may."

Travers looked at Mrs. Langdon with a laugh. "What is to be done?" he asked. “Shall we leave Russell and Miss Dorothea to face the risks alone?"

"Pooh, pooh!" said the general. "Not see a most interesting historical building because of such considerations — what nonsense!"

“Come,” said Russell, also looking at Mrs. Langdon. “It is late enough for a good view from the roof, and I will warrant you against unpleasant consequences."

“Oh! in that case of course we will go," said she promptly, while Travers shrugged his shoulders slightly, as he fell back with Miss Graham.

"I am really afraid of the result of this excursion on Russell's character," he confided to her. “The effect is not perceptible yet, but a man *must* become intolerable who is constantly telling people what they should do, and being deferred to and obeyed."

“It is more Dorothea's fault than Mr. Russell's," said Miss Graham in an aggrieved tone. '*If she would have some moderation we should not be dragged into so many impossible places! Now, this prison — I really don't think that I care for it at all."

“Then why trouble yourself to see it?" her companion inquired. “We shall pass the hotel on our way, and you can stop there."

“Shall *you*?" she asked.

“I? Oh, no!" he answered. "I am weak-minded enough to generally go with the majority."

“I suppose it is best," she said with a sigh, for the ways that lead to the Alhóndiga are steep, and the solitude of her chamber at the hotel was not inviting.

It is certainly the most impressive object in Guanajuato, this great Alhóndiga de Granaditas, as it stands on the higher ground of the city, looking far more like the citadel of war, into which Fate transformed it, than the peaceful commercial exchange for which it was erected. Few forts have ever stood more terrible sieges, and the shot-marks with which its walls are covered testify to the fury of the cannonading which it has suffered. Scarred with these signs of battle, bathed in memories of blood, each corner bearing still the grisly spike on which the head of a revolutionary leader was affixed, it is a picture never to be forgotten as it dominates the beautiful city like a stern reminder of the terrible scenes which once changed it into a very Inferno of horror.

Guanajuato

Fresh from the pages of history, where these scenes are written, the little group stood for some time gazing at the walls which are the memorial of so much endurance on the one side and daring on the other, of courage and heroism. of dauntless defiance and of passions unloosed to do the work of fiends.

"God forgive the man who, without gravest cause, brings the unspeakable horrors of war upon a country!" said the general very solemnly at length. “Only those who have seen war know what it is. And if, under its influence, men who have inherited the civilisation of ages become savages, what can be expected of those who have close behind them an absolutely savage past? What these walls have witnessed may answer."

"They witnessed the worst scenes of all the revolution," said Russell. "As savagery always provokes savagery, one side rivalled the other in excesses of cruelty. As for Hidalgo —I have not much admiration for his character, and scant sympathy for a priest who put himself at the head of anything certain to be so long and terrible as a war of revolution —but he must be granted patriotic intention and heroic courage."

"With him certainly the words were strikingly verified, that 'they who take the sword shall perish by the sword,'" said Margaret Langdon.

All eyes followed her own to the spike where that head once rested, the lips of which had uttered the Cry of Dolores —that stirring, heart-piercing cry which never died in the hearts of the people until Mexico had won the freedom that as yet has hardly proved a blessing to her. A plate let into the wall below the spike bears the simple name "Hidalgo," as at the other corners similar tablets bear the names of the other leaders whose heads were also displayed here—Allende,

Jimenez, and Aldama.

But when they entered, and led by a courteous official found themselves on the roof of the building, it was easy to forget all memories of warfare and bloodshed in the contemplation of the scene spread before them. The encircling hills, on which the watchfires of Hidalgo's forces once burned, were now bathed in sunshine that wrapped like a mantle their great brown shoulders, which were dotted with mines surrounded by grey, bastioned, loop-holed walls, and mining villages out of which graceful church spires rose. At their feet the city lay in a mass of softly-mingled colour, narrow streets winding through mediaeval houses, plazas forming lovely bits of greenness, splendid towers thrown out against the sky, the noble sculptured façade of the Compañía standing proudly on its mountain platform, and the sea-green arches of the unfinished theatre catching the eye, while over all was spread a charm as subtle but as distinct as the sunset radiance which presently fell upon and glorified it, making the beautiful semi-Oriental picture of many-tinted buildings, of fretted spires and shining domes swim, as it were, in a sea of golden light for a few enchanted minutes before the purple twilight fell.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VALENCIANA MINE.

IN the early freshness of the next morning a group of horses ready saddled, with a pair of *mozos* in attendance, stood before the door of the hotel, and were presently inspected by Dorothea, who came out from the café accompanied by Russell.

"They will do," she said, running her eye comprehensively over them, "if you are sure their backs are sound. I never ride a strange horse without satisfying myself on that point. There is no greater cruelty than to put a saddle on a galled back, and I would rather walk any distance than ride a horse under such circumstances."

"Make your mind easy," replied Russell. "I have examined the animals and their backs are sound. I secured them through the kindness of an acquaintance in Guanajuato, who promised to send me only good horses. Shall I put you up?"

He extended his hand, the next moment she was in the saddle arranging herself with practised ease, the others came out, there was a general mounting, and they rode away with a clattering of horses' hoofs on the stony streets, and that pleasant sense of exhilaration which always accompanies an expedition on horseback in the freshness of the early day. The two *mozos* on foot easily kept pace with the horses, and Mrs. Langdon remarked that the one who walked abreast with her was so picturesque a figure that she longed to sketch him. He was a slender, graceful young fellow, whose slight frame revealed only to a practised eye the muscular power which it possessed, and whose face, delicate in features, with large dark eyes and shaded by a mass of black curls under the straw *sombrero*, had the gentle, half-melancholy charm of his people. The other was an older Indian, lean and sinewy as a deerhound. Both men wore striped

zarapes folded closely around them—for the morning air was chill—wide cotton trowsers, and sandals on their feet.

Russell had explained to his friends the evening before that, although it was quite within the limit of the possible for them to reach the Valenciana Mine in a carriage, he was sure they would find the ascent more agreeable if made on horseback; and they were unanimous in endorsing this opinion when they found how steep was their upward way from the moment of leaving the central region of the city. The narrow, winding streets through which their guides led them climbed steadily up hill, sometimes at an angle of hardly less than forty-five degrees, and were so thronged with people, with strings of burros bearing all manner of produce, and with great wooden carts drawn by oxen, that progress through them was slow and difficult. At length, however, they emerged from the town, and found an agreeable change in the broad, well-made road which, although it still wound upward, had the advantage of easy gradients and of relief from paving-stones. Curbed on one side, it mounted with wide sweeps around the hills, affording a succession of views of their broken, serrated expanse, and of the different mines, surrounded by villages, that came into sight perched on their precipitous slopes.

The sun had risen high in the heavens, and his rays were as warm as they ever become at this altitude, when, after several miles of steady ascent, they entered a village of well-built adobe houses ranged in streets that centred upon a small plaza green with verdure and bright with lowers. Russell halted in this pretty place, and, turning in his saddle, addressed the cavalcade that gathered around him.

"I have brought you here," he said, "to see an excellent example of a Mexican mining town. All the people who live here depend for their support on the Valenciana Mine, the galleries of which run under our feet, and the great works of which are over yonder. Could a brighter, cleaner, more attractive village be found anywhere? Presently I will show you a school sustained by the proprietors for the children; but first I must call your attention to the chief feature of the place."

"Which is this splendid church before us, I suppose," said Mrs. Langdon. “What a remarkable thing to find such an edifice on this mountain-side, in the midst of a mining village!"

"It is not remarkable here," said Russell. "No one calls your attention to it, no guide-book mentions it, but when I accidentally stumbled upon it, and, struck by its beauty and splendid details, asked what it cost, I was told that there had been spent upon it the sum of one and a half million dollars."

"Spent by whom?” asked the general. " By the owners of the mine— quietly and unostentatiously, with a simple desire to return to God a small share of the wealth he had bestowed on them. The mine was in full bonanza when they built this, and it is said that for every dollar which they put into their great shaft—the finest in the world—they put a dollar in the church. I don't know how it seems to you, but to me there is something in this more poetical than I can express."

He looked at Margaret Langdon as he spoke, whose eyes met his with that quick radiance dimmed in moisture which is the outward sign of a heart deeply touched. “It was more than poetical," she said. “It was a thought so exquisite that it could only have been born of profound and fervent faith— that with every step downwards towards those riches which are so alluring to the hearts of men, there should be a corresponding step taken upwards, in the sunlight of God,

towards the heaven where our true treasure must be. Yes, surely they were poets, without knowing it, those men."

"And what strikes me as quite as beautiful," said Dorothea, "is, that instead of spending that money to build a great church down in Guanajuato, where all men could see and praise it, they built it here, so that few of the rich and great ones of the earth worship God in a temple as splendid as these poor Mexican miners possess."

"Well," said the general, dismounting, "let us go and see it now."

It is very majestic, this church of the Valenciana, from its position, as well as from its architectural proportions. Built of cut and polished stone, every block finished and fitted with a skill which knew nothing of haste or carelessness, it stands, in its stately magnificence, on a platform graded from the mountain, and is approached by an immense flight of stone steps that would adorn a cathedral. Entering by the great carved doorway, it is at once evident that the same loving care which polished every outward stone presided with jealous vigilance over every interior detail. The high altar, and the altars which stand at the ends of the transepts that form a Latin cross, are perfect examples of that superbly ornate style known as the Churrigueresque—a mass of rich and elaborate carving, covered with gold and rising in burnished splendour to the roof. No unfortunate detail or misplaced ornament mars the effect of these rarely beautiful altars. They are indeed so gorgeous in themselves that there is no space for farther ornament, and whatever is upon them, in the form of necessary articles, is altogether worthy of them. Polished tiles form the floor, frescoes adorn the domes, and paintings cover the walls; while the nave is filled with finely-carved benches. Nothing can exceed the effect of sumptuous richness and exquisite taste which the whole presents.

"It gives an impression," said Dorothea, "that the building of it was a delight, that the most careful thought was bestowed upon the elaboration of every detail, and that money was emphatically 'no object' at all in its construction."

"There can be no doubt of the last," said Russell. "The only question was how to spend enough of the precious metal. The splendour of these altars cannot be surpassed. If you go into the sacristy, the sacristan will show you vestments and vessels that will make you fancy yourself in a metropolitan cathedral; and there is a charming little baptistery where the babies are brought to be baptized in a golden font."

"It has a superb organ, too, this wonderful church that seems like a creation of Aladdin's lamp," said Travers, looking up at the choir-loft, where the forest of pipes rose towards the roof.

Presently they stepped out of a side door upon the great platform on which the church stands, and Russell pointed to some immense, fortress-like walls on one side of the village. "Those," he said, "enclose the offices and works of the mine and its famous shaft."

"We must certainly see that" said the general.

"We must certainly see the mine," said Dorothea. "Are we not going down into it?"

Russell smiled. "You can if you like," he answered. "There is an excellent stairway by means of which one can descend to any level; but I do not think you will care to go far. It is very dark and very warm underground, you know."

"I do not think I care to make such a descent," said Mrs. Langdon. "Dorothea, you had better not insist on doing so."

"Insist—no," said Dorothea. "But is it possible that nobody else cares to see anything of the mine itself!—and how can one see a mine above ground?"

"The question is, can one see much of it below?" said the general. "But I will go down with you as far as you are likely to venture, my dear. How and where do we enter?"

"We can only enter by obtaining a permit," replied Russell, "and that must be sought over yonder "—he again indicated the enclosure— "where we will now go."

It was a novel scene upon which they entered when they found themselves within the great gates that gave admittance to the fort-like interior, the massive stone walls of which were flanked at each corner by towers loop-holed for musketry. Passing the offices just within the entrance, where two or three gentlemen and a handsome dog received the party with true Mexican courtesy, they were conducted into a large courtyard where a number of men and women were at work sorting ores, the process consisting of breaking with a hammer the large masses brought up from the mine and rapidly classing the fragments. Around each worker were half a dozen piles of ore of different grades, and the busy activity of the scene, together with the quickness with which each fragment was scrutinised and classed, interested the strangers exceedingly.

"The women seem to know as much about it as the men," remarked Dorothea wonderingly.

"The superintendent says that they make better judges of ore than men," said Russell. "The perceptions of women are quicker, you see."

Travers observed that he had not needed to come to the Valenciana Mine to learn that; but just then they reached the side of the great shaft, and paused to regard with wonder and something of awe this splendid and durable work.

Octagonal in form, fifteen feet in diameter, and lined with carefully cut and fitted stone, one can readily believe almost anything of its cost, remembering that its depth is over two thousand feet, and that its workmanship is unsurpassed and probably unequalled in the world. Out of it is drawn by machinery the vast volume of water that keeps the lower levels dry; and it is altogether worthy of the mine which Humboldt estimated as producing at the time of his visit one fifth of all the silver of the world, and which for forty years was in full bonanza, pouring out its wealth in an almost fabulous stream.

Gathered around the great opening, they listened while their courteous guide discoursed of the wonders of the famous mine, told the romantic story of its first days, described its miles of underground work, its chambers, drifts and tunnels, the army of men upon its pay-roll, and the length of time necessary to descend and ascend by means of its stairways.

"Why, in the name of common sense, don't they send the miners up and down by means of this" said the general, indicating the shaft, ' and save time?"

Russell laughed. "We are in a happy land where time is not of importance," he replied. "But I scarcely think Miss Dorothea will care to descend to the lowest levels when she hears that more than two hours are required to reach them."

"I think," said Dorothea in a somewhat subdued tone, "that I shall be satisfied with going down to the first level—just to see what it is like, you know."

Informed of her desire, the superintendent said that he would himself accompany them; so they were led back through the village to a building which gave admittance to the mine. Only

Dorothea and her father, Russell and their guide, went down. Mrs. Langdon, Miss Graham, and Travers returning to the church, seated themselves in the shade, where the pure, fresh air of the mountains came to them like a breath from Paradise, and a far-spreading view lay before them—one of those glorious Mexican views which language is too poor to describe, so infinite is the beauty of tint and atmosphere, so wonderful the combination of rugged mountain forms and wide stretches of smiling plain, of cities shining with hues that seem borrowed from the peacock's neck, of mines frowning like mediaeval strongholds, of slender campaniles rising everywhere towards the ineffable radiance of the vast blue heaven.

"What a country it is!" said Margaret Langdon, as her gaze wandered over the picture. "I do not wonder that Mr. Russell feels such enthusiasm for it—one could not stop short of loving it if one stayed long enough."

"It would be hard to find anything to equal it in beauty and interest," said Travers. "There is so much combined here. The deep and lasting impress of Spain—most fascinating of modern nations—the striking Oriental aspect of the country, the personal beauty of the people, their picturesque life, and the romanticism that seems a part of all they do. Look at this church, for instance—is it not like a fairy-tale to our nineteenth century ears?"

"It is far more than that," Margaret answered. "It is such a sermon in stone as I have never met before in all my wanderings. And these are the people whom we—some of us, that is—have ventured to think an inferior race!"

"Don't class yourself with the ignorant multitude—mostly fools, as Carlyle justly observes—who instead of intelligent opinions have only a few inherited prejudices," said Travers.

"But Miss Graham looks sadly bored! I am afraid that our rhapsodies over the country have a tendency to fatigue her."

"Oh! I assure you I find it all very interesting," said Miss Graham, "though I don't perhaps express as much enthusiasm as Dorothea. As for this church, it is simply splendid—but really now don't you think it would be more appropriate down in Guanajuato than up here in a mining village?"

Travers glanced at Mrs. Langdon and smiled. "That depends," he answered, "upon what object the builders had in view. If the admiration of men, Guanajuato was the place. If the glory of God, I venture to think the present situation could not be improved upon. But here come our friends back from the mine already! Mademoiselle Dorothea's exploring spirit has been speedily satisfied on this occasion."

"Oh! it was excessively warm; that was why I did not go very far," Dorothea said, in answer to their questions. "But you need not smile, Mr. Travers. It was exceedingly interesting, and I am glad I went down."

"What did you see? Tell us about it," said Miss Graham, yawning slightly, as if in remembrance of past or anticipation of coming boredom.

“Yes," said Mrs. Langdon, "let us have the satisfaction of knowing what is to be seen in the depths of a mine, without the fatigue of descending into it ourselves."

"Well," responded Dorothea, looking the while around the wide prospect with a radiant glance, as if the sweet, fresh purity of the air and the glorious brightness of the day appealed to her senses with a double charm since she had been into the dark bowels of the earth, "let me tell you that there is simply a world down there—a new, strange, wonderful world it was to me—and

as for its inhabitants, they appear, to use an Oriental form of expression, to be in numbers as the sands of the sea-shore. How did I see them? Why, an army, an absolute army, was going down into the mine as we came up."

"The men are changed three times in every twenty-four hours," said the general, "and we chanced to meet one of these 'shifts,' as miners call it. You see the building which covers the mouth of the mine contains various apartments—chiefly used for storing material—but especially one large room where clerks are at their desks day and night to keep the time of the men at work. As each 'shift' enters the building, marched in squads like soldiers, the names are called out and registered by the clerks as the men descend the stairs into the mine."

"And such stairs!" said Dorothea. "Built of great blocks of hewn stone, beautifully laid, and as wide— how wide, Mr. Russell?"

"They are square-cut blocks of porphyry about ten feet wide," said Russell, "and the walls on each side are plastered and whitewashed. It is a magnificent work, this stairway, for it descends to the lowest level of the mine, a distance of more than two thousand feet, turning to right or left at a depth of every hundred feet."

"One is fatigued even in thinking of ascending or descending it," remarked Miss Graham feelingly.

"We saw one sight which touched me inexpressibly," said Dorothea. "At each angle of this great stairway, this work of Titans, is a niche excavated out of the solid rock, forming a shrine and containing a religious image, a picture or statue, adorned with flowers, and with a light burning before it. I can give you no idea," turning to her sister, as if surest of sympathy there, with the bright moisture of feeling springing again into her eyes, "how the sight of these shrines, with their tapers gleaming like stars, affects one, when one comes upon them suddenly in the darkness and silence of the depths of the earth. How lovely the faith of these people is!—and how it pervades their lives! It seems to put a strain of elevated feeling, a comprehension of divine beauty, into their existence which our poor, materialised people of the same class totally lack."

"One might certainly travel far through any mining region of our favoured land before finding a mine provided with such an accessory as a shrine underground and a basilica above," observed Travers reflectively. "But then we have been repeatedly informed that Mexicans are very superstitious!"

"One wonders," said Dorothea caustically, "if those who make the charge are very good judges of what superstition is —or of what faith is, either, for that matter! Instead of scoffing at what they are unable to understand or appreciate, they would do better to go home and pray for a little of the faith and piety which touch and edify one here, and which are so wholly wanting in their hard, material lives."

"It almost sounds as if she were advising you to go home, Mr. Travers," said Miss Graham with quiet malice. "But did you see any silver taken out?" she asked, addressing Dorothea with a return to practical considerations for which she could always be relied upon.

"Oh, no!" answered Dorothea. "The place where they are now taking out silver is miles away from where we were. Have you forgotten that they told us there are twenty-eight miles of underground workings in this mine?"

"Dorothea was right in saying that it is simply a world down there," remarked the general—"a world of vast extent and wonderful work. There are miles of tramways laid in all directions for the transportation of the ore in the different ore-beds to the main perpendicular shaft—that splendid affair over yonder— through which it is hoisted to the surface."

"You seem to have taken in and remembered everything," said Miss Graham, "so now that we have heard everything, I suppose we may return to Guanajuato."

But at this moment Russell, who had been speaking apart to the courteous Mexican who accompanied them into the mine, turned towards the group. "This gentleman," he said, "suggests that you would perhaps like to see the method by which the ore is reduced. If you have never seen the Mexican reduction process, it is possible that it might interest you."

"It would interest me very much," said the general. "Where do we go—over there?" And he nodded towards the massive walls encircling the buildings that cluster around the great shaft, known far and wide as "El Tiro de la Mina Valenciana."

"No," Russell answered, "we must go to what is called the *hacienda de beneficio*. That is situated in the *cañada* between Marfil and Guanajuato."

"Why do they carry the ore so far, instead of having their reduction works near at hand?" asked Mrs. Langdon with surprise.

"Because water is necessary for the process of reduction," Russell replied, "and there is no water here."

"Oh! let us go by all means," cried Dorothea. "I want to see everything."

"A commendable but rather exhausting ambition," remarked Travers with a sigh. "If, however, it is so written in the book of Fate, let us go."

Miss Graham rose and shook out the folds of her habit with an air of resignation which mutely echoed his words; so they descended the great flight of stone steps to the sunny plaza lying in green beauty below, on the farther side of which, in the shade of some *portales*, the horses and *mozos* awaited them. They speedily mounted, and accompanied by a graceful young Mexican, whom the superintendent called from the office of the mine and sent with them, set forth for the reduction works.

But, instead of following the broad, well-graded road by which they had ascended, their guide led them around the frowning walls of the mine, and took a narrow trail across the brown, rugged hills, gashed with great ravines by the torrents of every rainy season. It was the trail by which the ore was conveyed from the mine to the reduction works, and along it came and went in ceaseless stream the pack-trains of burros that carried upon their backs the leather sacks filled with metal. To avoid these trains on the narrow way was difficult, for to give place in the least degree to anyone is an idea which never enters into the head of a burro. It was necessary for the men who followed each train to rush forward and energetically belabour and push the small, stubborn animals, to induce them to allow the party of equestrians to pass at various points. "The Valenciana Mine must have *thousands* of these donkeys!" Dorothea exclaimed at last, when such a block had occurred for the twentieth time, and looking across the escarped and riven hillsides they could trace the winding trail by the animals that darkened it. The young Mexican, who had a fair knowledge of English, laughed and assured her that she was right, that the burros of the Valenciana Mine were indeed many, while Travers observed that if she chanced to be pushed over into the dry bed of a torrent by one of the burros in question (an accident which had several

times only been prevented by the prompt interposition of the *mozos*) she could hardly object to suffering in the cause of that adherence to ancient custom which she so highly commended.

"The spirit of modern improvement might dictate a tramway to convey the ore from the mine to the reduction works," he added, "but far be it from me to suggest that such a mode would be an improvement on the present picturesque method—though what the burros might think of it is another matter."

"The burros would have to do other work if they did not do this, I suppose," Dorothea answered. "The pack-trains are picturesque, as one sees them winding in the distance; and it would surely be a very remarkable tramway that could go up and down hill like this trail."

There was a general laugh, but the exigencies of the trail were such that no one demonstrated the feasibility of the tramway, especially since another train of laden animals at this moment came by, pushing the party to right and left with their great sacks of ore, and when the interruption was fairly over they found themselves at the entrance of the *hacienda de beneficio*.

This proved to be one of the immense, fortress-like erections which had struck them on their ascent from Marfil to Guanajuato. Situated immediately on the banks of the stream which flows down from the beautiful Presas, and surrounded by a stone wall at least ten feet high and of corresponding thickness, it is an enclosure about twelve hundred feet long by two hundred wide, containing various open courts, or patios, and buildings with red-tiled roofs and arcaded fronts. Leaving their horses in charge of the attendants, the party followed their obliging guide, who was eager to show them everything.

First in order came the arrastras, for crushing the ore. On an elevated portion of the enclosure, covered by a tiled roof, were three rows of these, each row containing twenty arrastras—great, circular basins of cut stone, not less than eight feet in diameter, in the centre of each of which a horizontal wooden sweep was mortised through an upright post. To one end of this sweep the large millstone that ground the ore to powder against the stone floor of the basin was attached, while to the other were fastened the mules, wearing leather hoods over their eyes to prevent dizziness, who walking round in an unending circle supplied the motive-power to drag the huge mass of granite over the ore.

A residence at Guanajuato

"An effectual way of doing the work," said the general, "but very crude when one thinks of a modern stamp-mill. I am surprised that such a great mine as the Valenciana has not erected machinery for crushing its ore."

"The erection of a stamp-mill is, of course, only a question of time," said Russell. "Many of them have already been introduced into the country, especially by Americans and Englishmen, who find crushing ore in arrastras too slow work. But come!—our guide wishes to show us the next step in the process." The young Mexican had explained, with many gestures of his slender, brown hands, that when the ore was crushed to an impalpable powder a sluice-head of water was introduced into the arrastras, which carried the deposit to a lower level, and to this lower level he now led them. It was an enclosure, containing about an acre of ground, covered with a carefully laid floor of flagstones—forming the patio from which the process takes its name. The crushed ore carried from the arrastras is deposited on this floor to the depth of about eighteen inches, the surplus water is then drawn off, leaving the pulverized mass in a plastic condition, and quicksilver, in the proportion of five pounds to every ton of ore, is added, by means of forcing it through buckskin sacks, so that, when shaken over the bed of ore, it is distributed equally in small globules, thus bringing it immediately in contact with the silver, which is principally in a sulphide form. Five per cent. of common salt is then added for the purpose of assisting oxidization, and about twenty mules are turned loose and driven to and fro through this bed of mortar for three hours each day for thirty days.

"You recognize your black mud, do you not?" asked Russell, turning to Dorothea. "This is the amalgamating process which we looked down upon as we entered Zacatécas, and which struck you as so remarkable."

"And this is the famous *patio* process!" said the general. "I have heard men of great experience in mining say that for satisfactory results in extracting silver from the ore it has not been improved upon, even in this age of improvement."

"Is it of Mexican invention?" asked Dorothea.

"Yes," Russell replied. "It was invented in 1557 by Bartolome de Medina, to work the rich ores of the Pachuca mines."

"I have very little respect for him," said the young lady with decision, "for he certainly did not take the mules into consideration at all. Is it possible that no machinery has been invented to do this work better than these poor animals can?"

"I must confess," said Russell, "that one blot on the otherwise excellent character of Mexicans is that they do not take the feelings of mules, burros, and beasts of burden in general, much into consideration. Of course other means of doing the work of amalgamation have been invented, and are in use in American mines. But Mexicans are slow to accept innovations, and, as your father has just remarked, it is doubtful if any better process for a certain class of ore has ever been invented."

"You must be satisfied to take people with the defects of their qualities," said Travers in an admonishing tone. "If the Mexicans were ready to accept innovations with regard to working their ores, they would, no doubt, be equally ready to accept them in respect to other things, and then what would become of the picturesqueness of this incomparably picturesque country, for which we are all so grateful? It would become the prey of that destroyer which is known under the name of progress, and perhaps would abandon the beautiful art and architecture which Spain planted here for a tasteless imitation of the poorest and most alien modern models. No, let the mules suffer, say I, rather than that such things should come to pass."

Dorothea gave the speaker a glance in which approval and disapproval were mingled. "You are right so far," she said, "that it is a matter for gratitude that Mexicans are slow to change their ancient ways. *But*," with great emphasis upon this potent word, "I entirely disagree with you in your readiness to let the mules suffer. The mules should not suffer another day if I could bring in machinery to relieve them."

"And that machinery would be the entering wedge to destroy all that delights you in the country," returned Travers.

"If so, the wedge has entered," said Russell, "for large amounts of machinery for all purposes are constantly introduced into the country. I am afraid we cannot hope that the march of that material progress, the effects of which we agree in disliking, can be stayed here any more than elsewhere. We can only be thankful for what it has so far spared, and hope that Mexicans will have too much sense to allow their country to be ruined and deteriorated by it, as some others that we know have been."

"And meanwhile," said Mrs. Langdon, looking at the mass of amalgam, which indeed resembled nothing except black mud, "we do not seem to have got very much nearer to the silver."

"Ah, yes!" said the young Mexican, smiling. "The señora is mistaken—we are very much nearer to the silver. Be pleased," addressing the group, "to come now, and see the amalgam retorted."

They followed him to the next step in the process of wresting from Nature the treasure which she holds so jealously. But after they had inspected the kettle-shaped retorts in which the amalgam is placed, and had seen the silver which comes forth from them, to be then melted and run into bars—great, shining masses of virgin metal, beautiful to the sight and heavy to the touch—with the value stamped on each, there remained nothing more except to see the same bars loaded into the car for bullion, which, with a guard of soldiers on its top, is a daily feature of the Guanajuato train.

As it chanced, they did see this a few hours later, as they were, with much reluctance, taking their departure from the magical city, glittering in colour, beauty, and opulence behind the sombre, argentine hills. After they had left Marfil, with its heavy Moorish houses clinging to the frowning precipices that overshadow it, and had crossed the mountain divide to the smiling plain that spreads level and verdant towards Siloa, they looked backwards for a last glance at a spot which had so charmed them. Guanajuato had vanished as completely as if it were indeed the enchanted city which it seems, but lo! high above the rugged, red-brown crests shone on its elevated mountain platform the church of the Valenciana, lifting its fair towers towards heaven and looking in the rich sunset light like a dream of beauty, as it is, in truth, such an expression of faith and love, and generosity surpassing that of princes, as would be hard to match in any other land.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER IX.

THE PEARL OF THE WEST.

THE run from Siloa to Irapuato, where the branch to Guadalajara connects with the main line of the Mexican Central Railway, is through a country so beautiful that one might well wish it much longer. All memories of desert plains and barren heights are forgotten as the traveller enters upon the most rich and productive region of the great Mexican plateau. On each side of the railway highly cultivated lands spread for leagues, level as a table, to where mountains draped in softest veils of azure and amethyst bound the horizon. On these vast fields the labourers are mere moving dots of colour, though a hundred or two of them may often be seen together, each man guiding a plough drawn by a pair of oxen. The lithe figures in their bright dress, the slow-moving animals, types of patient strength, the rich brown hue of the freshly-turned earth, contrasting with the vivid green of springing grain on the land ploughed yesterday, the pellucid depths of the sky, the distant frame of dream-like heights, the shining towns on the plain that seem to have been conjured out of the imagination of a painter—all is like a page from the early days of the world, full of the charm and poetry of pastoral antiquity. Now and then a group of massive buildings, belonging to one of the great haciendas, estates which are absolute principalities in extent, comes into view. Walled around like a mediaeval city, these buildings comprise residences, store-houses, granaries, and invariably a church. Through the great open gates there are glimpses of arcades and immense courtyards, horsemen ride out with trappings

glittering in the sunlight, great clumsy carts, with nine or ten mules harnessed to them, lumber forth on the highway, or a string of patient burros bearing enormous packs come into sight, followed by figures on foot that seem transported from the most remote East, as their picturesque draperies are outlined against the wide distance of spreading land and sky.

"You have now entered upon a new phase of Mexico and Mexican life," said Russell, addressing General Meynell. “We have left the mining region and mining cities behind, and are in the midst of a country that depends for its wealth on agriculture alone. This great plain, known as the Bajio, is one of the richest and most famous agricultural districts of the plateau."

"I have never seen a more beautiful country, nor one apparently in a higher state of cultivation," said the general.

"Its productiveness is simply inexhaustible," said Russell, "and, with slight, natural interruptions, these vast bodies of land extend for hundreds of leagues. The State of Jalisco, which we shall enter very soon, is the largest and wealthiest of Mexican States, and its prosperity is drawn almost entirely from agricultural products."

"When one is fresh from Mexican history, all its picturesque panorama seems to unroll before one on these immense plains, which suggest the movements of great hosts," said Mrs. Langdon, with her eyes fixed dreamily on the distant expanse. "How they pass before the imagination—the warlike Aztecs, on their southward march from their vague, distant Asiatic home, the mail-clad Spaniards and brown-robed friars, with flag and cross, pressing northward to conquer the unknown New World, the wild hosts of Hidalgo, the armies of Maximilian and Juarez, and—and many more!"

"More than even your imagination can summon up," said Russell. "It was nothing but a vast theatre of war, this lovely country, for many a year, yet it smiles to-day as if blood and tears had not for so long been its chief harvest. But yonder is Irapuato! We change cars here for Guadalajara."

To this information, however, the others at first lent no ear, so much were their eyes and attention fascinated by the picture which Irapuato presents, as it is seen across the level plain, its beautiful domes and minarets rising above the richly massed verdure of the gardens that surround it, and against a background of soft, purple heights.

"What!" cried Dorothea, when she heard that they were to be vouchsafed no nearer sight. "Is it possible that we are to leave unseen a place that promises so much as this? It must be interesting, for look at the number of churches—and such churches! I have not seen more beautiful towers and domes anywhere."

"Probably the towers and domes are the best part of it—they generally are," observed Miss Graham; "and we can see them quite well from here."

"Be consoled," said Russell. "You are right about the towers and domes. They are peculiarly fine in effect, especially rising out of this lovely plain; but Irapuato itself does not offer sufficient attractions to detain us."

"*Fresas, fresas, señorita*!” "*Quiere V. las fresas, niña*?" cried a chorus of insinuating voices, as they emerged from the door of the car, while slender brown hands of all sizes and ages lifted up baskets heaped with the beautiful, fragrant strawberries which are as much the characteristic product of Irapuato as opals are of Querétaro or onyx of Puebla.

"Strawberries in December! Surely this is a land of wonders!" said Mrs. Langdon.

"Strawberries every day in the year at Irapuato," said Russell. “Their cultivation is the perennial industry of the place. All the accidents of climate and soil unite to produce them in unfailing abundance, aided by the skill and untiring irrigation of the inhabitants."

"In other words," said the general, "they have here all the conditions of an unending spring, which should be as favourable for many other products as for strawberries. How much for those?" he demanded of one of the venders. "*Cuanto*?"

"*Dos reales, señor*" was the prompt response.

"*Real y medio, señor,*" cried another, quickly interposing his basket.

"Better let Russell conduct the negotiations," suggested Travers. "What with the pleading of the eyes and the fragrance of the berries, I, for one, should speedily ruin myself."

It was a bright and picturesque scene which all these venders and their commodities formed, together with the throng of passengers for the different trains; and the party stood on the platform of their car, full of interest, talking gaily and asking a hundred questions, until, according to the fashion of Mexican railroads, the train, without sound or note of warning, moved off across the wide, sun-bathed plain, in a westwardly direction.

The scene within proved then hardly less novel and attractive to their eyes than the scene without had been; for, with few exceptions, their fellow-passengers were all Mexicans, friendly, sociable people, who talked to each other in a constant flow of sweet-sounding Spanish, smoked cigarettes incessantly, and exhibited all the types with which the traveller in the country soon becomes familiar. There was the family group, the stout, middle-aged señora, with her black hair smoothed like silk on her uncovered head, great golden hoops in her ears, and the invariable black shawl on her shoulders, talking volubly to a middle-aged gentleman with erect, iron-grey hair standing up from a square forehead, a darkly olive skin, and spare, sinewy frame. There were her daughters, lovely as pictures, with their lustrous eyes, their dark brows and lashes, their delicate features and clear brunette skins, but whose attire, and especially whose headgear, exhibited a lack of style that merited the mingled scorn and pity with which Miss Graham regarded it. There were young men in close-fitting trowsers, short jackets, and wide sombreros elaborately trimmed with silver, ivory-handled pistols displayed in the belts buckled around their waists, small feet encased in pointed shoes, and slender fingers deeply stained with nicotine. There were elderly *haciendados*, who came in at the way-stations, booted and spurred, and very dusty from long rides on horseback, and padres, with draping cloaks and tonsured crowns, who joined in the friendly general conversation, or, withdrawing to a remote seat, became absorbed in their breviaries.

And meanwhile the same open expanse of fertile country continued to delight the eye, the same level lands spread to distant hills robed in divinely blue and purple tints, the same dazzling excess of light and colour was in the luminous, overarching sky, while the white arches of haciendas, or the slender towers of village churches, gleamed against the violet folds of the far heights. On the wide, tree-dotted expanse immense herds of cattle and horses grazed, in the great fields the corn was garnered in heaps, and the whole effect of the country seemed more than ever like a vast, pastoral idyl. But presently there was a change. The mountains drew in, hills thickly strewn with volcanic scoriae and covered with a straggling forest growth shut out the fair valley views, the train mounted heavy grades, wound around and about the hills, and finally, crossing the divide, descended into another beautiful plain through which flows the largest river of

Mexico—the Lerma, or Rio Grande de Santiago, for by both names it is known. At the station of La Barca— the town itself lies distant half a dozen miles across the valley, with only one tall and stately tower in evidence—the river is crossed, and thence onward the railway follows its banks for miles, with the broad, shining current in full view. A paradise for sportsmen is here. Along the marshy margin of the stream wild ducks abound, together with many other varieties of water-fowl, which seem in these happy regions to increase and multiply without any interference on the part of man. From the other side of the car the glance sweeps over the wide valley to a range of aerial hills—so delicate in their faint blue, so lovely in their outlines, that they hardly seem of earth— which, as Russell told the gazers, encircle the shores of Lake Chapala.

"That is something you must see," he said, "that exquisite lake which lies in an enchanted atmosphere fully a mile above the sea. For charm of climate and scenery I have never known any region so near an earthly paradise as this beautiful lake region of Jalisco and Michoacan. Of the lakes that make it famous, Chapala is the largest and, with the possible exception of Pátzcuaro, best worth seeing."

"We must certainly see it," said Dorothea with decision. "Only tell us how to reach it."

This had not yet been fully told, or at least had led to many other things, of what Travers called the historical and statistical order, when there was an exclamation from a group of young people at the other end of the car. "Guadalajara! *Mire* Guadalajara!" which brought the strangers at once to the windows whence the city could be seen.

What a picture it is, this first view of the fair Pearl of the West, as she lies on the smiling plain, lifting her ivory towers towards skies of such radiance as scarcely look down upon any other portion even of this land of radiant skies, with distant mountains forming a background of celestial azure behind her mass of shining domes and Moresque minarets!

"And that is Guadalajara!" said the general. "It seems to be a very handsome city."

"Handsome!" repeated Mrs. Langdon. "It looks as if it were builded of nothing save marble and mother o' pearl. What was that poetical name you called it, Mr. Russell?"

"'La Perla del Occidente,' " answered Russell. "It is appropriate, is it not? She was the second capital of the country, the queen of all the rich western coast, this fair Guadalajara, before the era of railways. Now her importance has somewhat diminished; but when the line on which we are travelling is completed to the Pacific, she will lift her beautiful head again."

"I am sure she seems to hold it high enough already," said Dorothea. "She has a most regal air, with those tapering towers pointing heavenwards, and looking too exquisite for anything but the creation of a dream."

And so they gazed and talked, every moment drawing nearer to the city from whose gates tree-arched avenues lead in all directions to the villages that dot the verdant plain—villages with histories going far beyond the time when the fierce and warlike Nuño de Guzman led his army into western Mexico, and desiring to found a capital for this rich country, which the Spaniards called Nueva Galicia, named it after his birthplace in distant Spain. The present city still bears the name, but is not located upon the spot first selected in 1531, for, finding that site ineligible, the small colony of Spaniards moved a few years later to the present situation on the banks of the San Juan de Dios River, near the friendly Indian town of Mexicalcingo, now a suburb of Guadalajara.

Of these things Russell discoursed to a group who, it is to be feared, did not pay great heed to the ancient deeds of Nuño de Guzman and the other noble founders of Guadalajara. The level plain over which they were moving seemed to grow more luxuriantly green and beautiful as they advanced. On one side was a view across a meadow, knee-deep in grass, of a wide road shaded by noble trees, along which carriages were driving, with wheels flashing in the sunlight, and horsemen prancing on richly caparisoned steeds; on the other the eye was led to a rolling ridge somewhat higher than the city, crowned by a white-walled, tower-and-dome-capped town, which Russell pointed out as San Pedro, formed chiefly of the summer homes of the wealthier class of Guadalajara.

Then, as the train passed through a gap in the walls and made its way between closely surrounding houses and courts, with glimpses of feathery palms rising against the sky, the general began to wonder if Phil would be on hand to meet them.

That question was answered a moment later when, as the train pulled into the station, and before its movement had ceased, a handsome bronzed young man, wearing a Mexican sombrero, entered the car, his bright eyes glancing around in eager expectation. "Phil, my dear boy!" cried the general, and the next moment father and son were exchanging hardly intelligible greetings. Dorothea cast herself recklessly forwards, and Mrs. Langdon followed with an equal light of gladness on her face. All was confusion for a few minutes, and then Philip Meynell became conscious of a pair of violet eyes looking up in his, a small, perfectly-gloved hand extended, and a sweet voice saying:

"You did not expect to see *me*!"

"Oh, yes, I did!" he answered cheerily. "The last letter I had from home told me that you had joined the expedition. I was greatly surprised, but of course greatly pleased, too. It is delightful to see so many familiar faces all at once. Ah, Leon, and you have positively been induced to come too! Mr. Russell must be an absolute sorcerer. Now, here we are!"— as the train finally came to a full stop. "Never mind the crowd; just follow me. I have a carriage waiting. But some of you will probably like to walk to the hotel—the distance is short."

"I should much prefer to walk," said Dorothea promptly. And so, between her father and brother, she stepped off lightly, leaving Mrs. Langdon and Miss Graham, attended by Russell and Travers, to occupy the waiting carriage. Despite her pleasure at being again with the young fellow whose laughing brown eyes were so like her own, and her many inquiries regarding his life in Mexico, her glances lost no single detail of the scenes around her. And when, soon after they left the station, their way led by the walls of an old church of vast extent and massive solidity, she eagerly questioned her brother concerning it. But the fact that he was not fitted to fill Russell's place was at once abundantly demonstrated.

"It is the church of San Francisco, or rather, I believe, there are two or three churches in one," he replied. "How old is it? Good heavens! how should I know? I think I've heard, however, that it is tremendously old— only less so than that venerable relic of the past over yonder."

And he nodded carelessly across a wide space to what was in fact the first Franciscan foundation, an ancient and strikingly picturesque building, with open, Carmelite belfries and quaintly carved doorway, its fortress-like walls of brown stone, and high, small windows presenting a perfect example of an early Spanish mission church. Only less ancient in appearance, as Philip had remarked, but far more magnificent in size and detail, is the noble sanctuary which

fascinated Dorothea's attention. Part of what was once a great Franciscan monastery—in the cloisters of which cavalry now stable their horses!—the beautiful old church remains one of the most beautiful and interesting in this city of splendid sanctuaries.

Plaza of San Francisco, Guadalajara

When they entered the plaza before it, and paused for a comprehensive view of the stately pile, Dorothea's enthusiastic admiration was well justified. The elaborately sculptured front is carved in pink porphyry, which has taken with time the most wonderful and exquisite tints; the superb tower is a marvel of picturesqueness, and the whole mass, crowned by its graceful domes, is a study for an artist which not a touch could improve. At this moment a rich sunset glow was falling over the façade, bringing out all the varied colouring of the stone and the quaint device of the sculpture, while the great tower, upthrust against the blue intensity of the sky, was bathed in golden light.

"What a picture!" said Dorothea half under her breath. She looked from the rich front of the church to the plaza, where in the alleys of the garden—lovely vistas formed of orange-trees that meet in green arch overhead—people were sitting and walking, while the band of the regiment then in quarters, in the old monastic building adjoining the church, was playing as only a Mexican military band can play. The air was laden with perfume, and palpitating with radiance and melody. "What a picture!" she repeated. "Let us sit down and enjoy it."

But at this point the general protested. "Let us first go and settle ourselves," he said, "and let me relieve myself of some of the confounded dust of this country. Then I am at your service for any length of time."

It was impossible to refuse such a moderate request, so leaving the plaza they took their way along a street which Philip told them was the Calle San Francisco—the principal thoroughfare of the city, handsome, straight, clean, and attractive, as all Guadalajara streets are.

The narrow sidewalks were filled with a throng of prosperous-looking people, the shop-windows were brilliant with the products of France, and now and again the stately arched entrance of some *casa grande* afforded a view of the spacious, paved court within, the family coach in the background, and the carved stone pillars supporting the graceful galleries of the upper story, on which the apartments of the dwelling opened. The way had seemed very short when Philip made a motion to turn into another street, saying, "Here is our hotel."

But Dorothea paused, as if held by a spell. "Phil," she said, "I perceive yonder the ivory towers that seemed beckoning us from afar to Guadalajara, and I must see them nearer. Also there is a plaza. Let us go to the next corner—just to the next corner, papa! I will not keep you long."

"Those are the cathedral towers, which are not at all likely to run away," replied her brother. "And of course there is a plaza. But you had better wait and go later, when there will be music."

"We will go later also," returned wilful Dorothea. “But I must have a glimpse now."

She drew her somewhat reluctant companions along with her, and paused, as she had promised, at the next corner, under the shade of the wide and handsome *portales* which adorn the blocks of business houses that on two sides enclose the great quadrangle of the Plaza de Armas—that heart of the city, so often filled with war and tumult in those tumultuous days of a past which Mexico fondly hopes to have left for ever behind her.

Perhaps it is to mark this hope that all over the country the old Spanish plazas are being laid out in gardens, which, however beautiful in themselves, are, nevertheless, often a drawback to the architectural effect of the noble edifices looking upon them. Well did the great builders of mediaeval Europe know what was essential for the effect of their mighty masterpieces, when in every instance they planned for the open space before them. Such space is necessary as a setting for these monuments of human genius, and Mexicans have not been wise when they have, in too many cases, diminished the effect of their grand cathedrals and churches by undue devotion to the tropical loveliness of flowering trees and shrubs. In the Plaza de Armas of Guadalajara this result is not so apparent as in many others, for although the garden is there, filling with odorous beds of violets, with roses and orange-trees, the central space of the great hollow square—and a charming pleasance, surely, when from the brilliantly lighted pavilion in the centre strains of music pour forth on the fragrance-laden air, and streams of promenaders pass around the broad walks lined with trees and seats!—the cathedral does not suffer in effect as much as might be anticipated, for the reason that it only presents a side view of its vast mass to this plaza. According to the design of its builders, the immense and imposing pile, which includes, as is usual in Mexico, the Sagrario, or first parish church, stood in superb isolation between two large plazas, its atrium giving upon a smaller, which is as yet untouched by the decorator. Hence the view from the Plaza de Armas offers a picture so satisfactory to the eye in the long, continued lines of the richly balustraded cornices, the symmetrical towers and beautiful, lantern-crowned domes, with the arcaded loggia at the farther end of the Sagrario, that possible criticism is lost in admiration.

Certainly Dorothea found no fault with the picture when her eye rested on it for the first time, as the same lovely light that had lent an added charm to the old church of San Francisco was falling over the soaring pinnacles and gleaming domes. Rose-red masses of feathery clouds

were tossed upon a sea of pearly blue, while in the great, open arches of the towers dark forms of men and boys were silhouetted against the glowing sky, waiting the moment to wake all the echoes of the air with the deep-mouthed clangor of the bells hung there. Below, all the animated life of a great city was surging in full tide, carriages driving, horsemen riding, tramcars coming and going, the plaza and streets filled with people. Everything was steeped in light and colour—the verdure and bloom of the garden, the long, and handsome façade of the Governor's Palace, and the arcade, under which they stood, with its picturesque groups of dealers and purchasers around the stalls placed against the great pillars.

There are no more tempting places for loitering than these *portales*, whether it be for observation or for purchasing, and Dorothea looked wistfully down the crowded vista. But she was a person of her word, and turning, with a slight sigh, she signified her readiness to return to the spot whence they had diverged. "To-morrow!" she said to herself, however, in the tone of a promise. And then she added aloud: "What hackneyed remark is it that every traveller in Mexico makes about this being the Land of Mañana? Ah, if it were only so!—if it were really the Land of To-morrow, a land where one might find time to fulfil all those hopes, dreams, and plans one has deferred to so many morrows that have never come! If one might only find them here, in this lovely land, waiting for one! Would not that be worth coming to Mexico for, papa?"

"My dear," replied the general, "I have found much worth coming for—but To-morrow, like Yesterday, we must be content to leave in the hands of God."

"Hark!" said the girl. She held up her hand and stood for a minute breathless, listening with parted lips. The great cathedral bell, deep, mellow, resonant, had just boomed out upon the air with a sound that seemed to thrill heart and ear alike. And as its first stroke was borne over the city, few men in all the crowded streets did not uncover their heads. Old and young alike, they walked gravely hat in hand, while the roseate air seemed to tremble with the full-toned melody of the reverberating notes. And then—was it joy gone mad—the wild, clashing uproar that arose from a hundred brazen tongues in every quarter, the lesser cathedral bells leading the mighty diapason of sound, as they turned over and over upon their frames, like creatures frenzied with delight? It was such a jubilation, such a rejoicing, as words are totally inadequate to express, and as no other sounds on all God's earth can express save bells rung like these Mexican peals, and the deep-mouthed roar of cannon.

"I feel as if I could shout, in unison with the bells—I am trembling with excitement—and I don't know in the least what it is all about!" said Dorothea, when speech finally became possible. "Oh! had you any idea before that metal could express such a passion of joy? What is it about, Phil?"

"It is because to-morrow is the feast of Guadalupe—the great, patronal feast of Mexico," her brother answered.

"But come now—they will all wonder what has become of us!"

They found, however, that the other members of the party had not troubled themselves with many conjectures regarding their fate. "We knew that Dorothea had insisted on stopping somewhere," calmly observed Mrs. Langdon, who was by this time thoroughly established, and looking as much at home as if she had grown up in it, in one of the rooms Philip had secured, which proved to be the best the house afforded—immense apartments with lofty, frescoed

ceilings, floors of the highly glazed tiles for which Guadalajara is famous, and great windows opening on balconies that overlook the handsome, busy street.

It was while they were at supper on the plant-adorned corridor which encircled the inner court of the hotel, a starry sky looking down upon them through wide arches, balmy airs fanning them, brilliant lamplight shining on a well-appointed table, and attentive dark-eyed servants skimming lightly and noiselessly to and fro over the shining floor, that Dorothea expressed herself as greatly pleased with Guadalajara. A suggestion that she had not seen much of it was treated with the scorn it merited.

"A place always makes an instantaneous impression on me," she declared, "and I seldom change that impression. This place is charming—not with the mediaeval picturesqueness of Guanajuato, but with a brilliancy, a lightness, a grace peculiarly its own."

"For myself," observed Philip deliberately, "I thought Guanajuato a beastly kind of place—hardly a square foot of level ground in it, precipitous, winding streets about a yard wide, dreadful smells, and so cold when I was there that not even the sun had power to warm one."

"O Phil!" remonstrated his elder sister. "Do not so recklessly expose your total lack of artistic appreciation."

' Do you know," said Travers, "that we have all been kept at such a high pitch of admiration by the united efforts of Russell and Miss Dorothea, that I find such an honest expression of Philistine—no pun intended!—sentiment very refreshing. Now that I come to think of it, I remember that I perceived some odours which were not those of Araby the Blest, in that picturesque city, and no one can deny that it was cold."

"I liked the Presa," said Miss Graham, with an air of making a concession.

"Yes, the Presa was not bad," said Philip tolerantly, "especially when a band was playing there, and lots of people about. But I like cheerful things—and Guadalajara is cheerful."

“I wonder Mr. Russell likes it then," said Miss Graham, finding an opportunity to take a small revenge for much past boredom. "He seems to think things worth looking at only when they are very old and gloomy."

Russell, with a smile, remarked that while he sometimes admired old and gloomy things, he was not thereby debarred from appreciating at their just value new and cheerful ones. "And Guadalajara is very cheerful," he added, "though happily not new."

"I think it quite the most attractive place we have seen," said Miss Graham with decision. Perhaps it was the perception of the glance which accompanied this remark, as well as several other glances which the violet eyes had sent in the same direction, that made Dorothea suddenly observe: “Oh! by the way, Phil, what has become of the Mexican friends of whom you wrote so enthusiastically? What is their name?"

"De Vargas," responded the young man promptly. "Well, they have become my friends in earnest—which I could hardly have said when I first wrote of them—and, to prove it, they have kindly sent an invitation for the whole of you to go out to their hacienda and spend as long a time as you like."

"An invitation for the whole of us!" said Mrs. Langdon. "They can hardly know how many we are.”

"Yes, they do I I told them that, as far as I could make out, about a dozen people were coming—"

"How good of you," said Dorothea, "to double our number and give the impression that we were a Cook's party of tourists!"

"But Don Rafael simply waved his hand and said the more the better. He would like to make the acquaintance of so many good Americanos—and he knew they must be good since they were friends of mine."

"Very kind of Don Rafael, I am sure," said the general. "If you think he was in earnest and not talking in the Oriental style that I am told these people affect, we might consider the matter. I should like to see something of life on one of these great estates, and compare it with what life is, or rather was, on our Southern plantations."

"I am perfectly certain that Don Rafael was in earnest," said Philip, "and in point of fact I have accepted in your name, and made all the arrangements—for I knew you would like to go. Carriages are to be sent from the hacienda for us on any day we may appoint. We'll settle that, and I will then write a line making the appointment. Now, what do you all say to a turn in the plaza? There is music to-night. And there is a great religious fiesta going on, which will interest you. Perhaps you would like to drop in at the cathedral."

"To-night?" asked Mrs. Langdon.

“Yes, to-night," answered Russell, "for Phil is right—we are on the eve of the great national feast of Guadalupe, and you could not see it celebrated better anywhere than in Guadalajara. I chanced to be here at the same date two years ago, and I remember well the striking effect of the whole celebration, especially the illumination of the cathedral."

"Do you suppose it will be illuminated to-night?" asked Dorothea, springing eagerly to her feet. "Then let us go at once."

There was no dissenting voice, and ten minutes later the party issued from the hotel. A few steps along the street on which it opened, and then, as they turned into the Calle San Francisco, a vision burst upon their sight so dazzling and so unexpected that there was a simultaneous exclamation of wonder and admiration from every lip.

Before them rose the majestic mass of the cathedral, out lined in fire, a marvellous and enchanting sight! Along the level lines of its balustraded roofs, along the rich cornices and Greek porticoes, around the great towers where swung the bells of mighty music, and about the soaring domes and graceful lanterns which crowned them, the flashing lines of flame ran, so that the splendid edifice was literally ablaze with light, and every detail of its architecture was traced in a radiance that baffles description against the dark-blue sky.

"How wonderful!—how magical!" cried Dorothea, as usual the first to rush into expression. "Never have I seen anything so beautiful—never!"

"And you never will, unless you see the illumination of St. Peter's at Rome, as in the Papal days," answered Russell. "It is the only effect of the kind I have ever seen which surpasses this."

“It is difficult to believe that anything could surpass it," said Margaret Langdon. They had none of them eyes for anything else, as they crossed the plaza, where music was pealing from the pavilion, throngs of people were walking on the broad, electric-lighted pavement, and other throngs were seated under the trees. But not even Violet Graham thought of pausing or regarding anything else, until they had seen and admired the wonderful spectacle before them from every point of view. And when they came to the front of the cathedral they found that the

splendour of the illumination culminated in the lines of dazzling flame that flickered and wavered along the superb façade, and concentrated its greatest brilliance on the sculptured "Assumption" above the vast central portal.

"It is magnificent!" said Travers. "Like yourself, Russell, I cannot imagine anything surpassing it, except the famous illumination of St. Peter's. What a genius for the beautiful, what a true, artistic perception, these people possess!"

"If this were all, it would be well worth coming to Guadalajara to see," replied Russell. "But look yonder!"

He pointed as he spoke, and as the others followed the motion with their eyes, they perceived, thrown out proudly against the sky, the stately old tower of San Francisco, wearing a triple diadem of fire, and blazing like a glorious beacon on the night.

"Heaven, how it thrills one! —like noble, exulting music!" exclaimed Dorothea.

"And there is the music itself," said her sister. "Listen!—pealing through the cathedral doors. Let us go in."

Crossing the paved *atrium* which divides the front of the church from the street, they entered through one of the three lofty portals into an interior more beautiful than even the wonderful sight without had led them to anticipate. They had by this time seen many great Mexican churches, and were familiar with some features of space and decoration common to them all; but never yet had they entered one so noble in proportion and so striking in detail as the Cathedral of Guadalajara. Seen at any time and under any circumstances this would have been the impression produced, but as they saw it to-night such an impression was tenfold heightened by the fact that the whole of the vast edifice was filled with a light so soft, so brilliant, so perfectly diffused, that every line of its architecture and trait of its decoration was revealed with a clearness surpassing that of noonday. Who does not know the effect which wax candles in sufficient number can produce? And here were hundreds, nay, thousands, burning in prodigal profusion, and flooding the great cathedral with their lustre. Chandeliers filled with clusters of tapers were suspended at intervals from the vaulted roof down the whole length of the nave and aisles, and other clusters filled branching candelabra attached to the columns on each side of the altars that lined the walls of these aisles. The stately high altar of marble—before the revolution it was of solid silver—was brilliant with countless lights, and the altar of Our Lady of Guadalupe was simply a blaze of unimaginable splendour, while ranged on the floor before it were heavy golden candle sticks, tall as a man, bearing such immense candles of purest wax as one sees only in Mexico. In the pervading radiance of this illumination the eye followed with delight the expanse of the spreading nave and aisles, the massive pillars supporting the lofty roof, the rich chapels behind their gates of gilded metal, the multitude of handsome altars, the frescoed dome soaring above the choir, with its magnificent stalls of carved mahogany, while about the high altar, throned on the elevated platform, which is raised several feet above the level of the nave, and approached from the aisles that extend on each side by flights of marble steps, was seen as in a vision, through clouds of fragrant incense- smoke, a train of priests, deacons, and acolytes, in vestments of shining splendour. And meanwhile, although there was no crowd, the great nave was filled with a throng which, changing constantly, never lessened. In and out, from the streets beyond, poured the people, coming and going without noise or bustle, all classes and conditions offering a constant tribute of devotion, kneeling without distinction of place on the wide,

polished pavement—a silken-clad, lace-draped lady side by side with a blanketed Indian, whose right in this splendid temple was equal to hers, and who owed no man deference of place in his Father's house.

And while the eye strove to satisfy itself with seeing, what strains of exquisite music enchanted the ear! The choir was singing, with full orchestral accompaniment, the matins and lauds of the feast, and waves of noble harmony rolled through the vast space of roof and nave and isles. Now and again lovely boyish voices sang to violin accompaniments, there were mellow tenor solos, and quartets that ravished the listening ear. It was a long, an elaborate and a marvellously well-rendered musical programme, such as astonished the listeners more than anything else they had so far encountered in the country. And when it was all over, when amid bursts of music, the delicate notes of wind-instruments aiding the organ's roll of thunder, Solemn Benediction had been given, when the jubilant clashing of bells in the great towers had told the city that the splendid *función* was ended, and. They found themselves again in the open air, Russell smiled at their expressions of surprise.

"You do not know," he said, "that Mexicans have as great a genius for music as for other forms of art, and Guadalajara is the musical centre of the country. There is an excellent school of music here, in which the most famous musicians of the country are trained. But now having seen the religious celebration of this great festival, come and see the popular side of it."

"Where are you going'?" Philip asked. "To the Santuario?"

“Of course. That is where the fiesta of the people is to be seen."

"And that is what we would not on any account miss seeing," said Dorothea.

Passing from the front of the cathedral across the plaza, on its farther side, also adorned with flowers and shrubs, they found themselves at the entrance of a long, straight street, which formed a brilliant vista to the gaze, as nearly every house along its length was decorated with the effective lights— small vessels of burning oil—which are used in illuminating the exterior of buildings, and also with a profusion of lanterns of many colours, together with rich draperies, green boughs, and pictures of Our Lady of Guadalupe, "Mother of the Mexicans," as a hundred banners proclaimed her. Radiating on each side as they proceeded were other illuminated streets, the long lines of their lights shining like stars in the far distance; but the one on which they were seemed to surpass all others in the number and brightness of its decorations, while the sidewalks were filled with a moving throng of men and women, their faces all set in the same direction—towards an arch of fire that spanned the street in the distance. While not so fashionable a throng as that in the Plaza de Armas, they were respectable, well-behaved (when is a crowd in Mexico not well-behaved?), and evidently composed of all classes. The arch of fire proved to consist of gaily-coloured paper lanterns strung on wires across the street. But at this point there came into view something which drew attention from any other object—a grand old church, standing superbly on commanding ground, with a pair of the most picturesque open belfries possible to conceive, its entire mass brilliantly illuminated and outlined, like an enchanted structure, against the violet sky.

"What an effect?" exclaimed Margaret Langdon, as they all paused to admire the marvellous picture. "Every line of the building is brought out, and there is not a light too much. It is simply perfect!"

"Look at the plaza!" said the general. "By Jove! there's a crowd for you!"

The plaza in front of the great church—in the midst of which is a very lovely garden, elevated several feet above the surrounding road-way, and encircled by a low stone wall— was indeed filled with a solid mass of humanity, while surrounding it like a fringe on all sides were the venders of tortillas, sugar-cane, and strange fruits and vegetables, with stranger Indian names, established on squares of matting, and selling their commodities by the light of flaring torches that lent a barbaric aspect to the scene. Wildly picturesque it all seemed to the strangers, who stood looking on with fascinated interest. The magnificent old sanctuary lifting its sculptured mass, solid as a mediaeval fortress, the beautiful garden breathing fragrant odours, the long lines of illuminated streets, and the immense throng of people, with the glare of the torches thrown on their Aztec faces and brilliant draperies, made a whole so wonderful in contrast and suggestion that they were scarcely able to put its striking impression into words.

"The setting is of Europe—for that old church looks as if it were transported bodily from some city of Spain, and Paris might envy the beauty of these gardens and streets—while the people, in outward aspect at least, are exactly as Cortes and De Guzman found them," said Travers. "Where else in the world can such a combination be seen?"

"Come, and I will show you one particular in which they are not as Cortes and De Guzman found them," said Russell.

He led the way, and they all followed him with difficulty through the dense mass of people, until they came to the great open portals of the church, where the crush resolved itself into a steady stream of humanity flowing in and out of the sanctuary. The pressure just at the door was tremendous, but once within, they found a scene common in Mexico, but to their unaccustomed eyes most wonderful and moving. For this was different from the stately *función* of the cathedral, impressive as that had been. There the people had indeed come and gone in numbers, and with a decorum fitted to the splendid solemnity of the worship at which they assisted. But here they were in multitudes, on their own ground as it were, paying their own spontaneous tribute of adoration to that gentle Queen of Heaven who had deigned to show herself so marvellously to the humblest of their race.

Churches of San Francisco, Guadalajara

This was truly the *fiesta* of the people, and they filled the vast nave with their kneeling forms, each one absorbed in his or her own devotion, while at the farther end, in the spacious apse of the Latin cross in which the church is built, was a vision of dazzling splendour—the Sacred Host throned high on the altar of white-and-gold, in the midst of countless tapers, forming glittering festoons of light, with rich crimson velvet draperies surrounding a copy of the picture of Guadalupe, and the entire sanctuary a blaze of decoration, of light, colour, and beauty, that might well convey some faint idea of the New Jerusalem to the eyes gazing upon it with such adoring faith and love. The dense crowd which filled the church from wall to wall never seemed to grow less, although it often changed; for hardly did one figure rise and pass out before another dropped into its place on the pavement. And from the mass rose at intervals outstretched arms and small, brown, toil-worn hands, lifted up in touching appeal toward Him who on earth was Himself a son of poverty and toil. Suddenly there was a roll of organ music from a gallery above, and a choir began singing a hymn, in which the people joined with a melody deep and many-toned as the voice of the sea. It was a scene from the Ages of Faith, from simpler times of deeper faith than ours—the great, open, splendidly decorated church, in and out of which the people went as freely and with as little ceremony as in their own homes, passing from pleasure to devotion, and from devotion back to pleasure again, not divorcing the two but making them one, with the love and confidence of children, while outside the brilliantly illuminated front of the sanctuary looked down benignantly, as it were, on the mirth of the plaza, where there was no sign or token of unseemly revelry.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER X.

IN GUADALAJARA WAYS.

DELIGHTFUL were the days which the travellers spent in Guadalajara. It seemed to them that nowhere else had they beheld such jewel-like depths of sky, baffling all comparison to earthly tints in its dazzling azure, such brilliant sunshine, such beautiful houses, gay with flowers and plants and delicate frescoes, such odorous public gardens where the watercarriers came to fill their red water-jars at the brimming fountains, or such marvellously picturesque churches with sculptured façades and splendid towers, speaking so eloquently of the generosity of past generations, and offering studies to enchant an artist, in their form and colour.

And hardly less rich in beauty of aspect, as well as in many treasures of art, are the interiors of these old sanctuaries. The superb Murillo which glorifies the cathedral and is the pride of Guadalajara—although a stranger who did not know of its existence might come and go and never hear of, far less see it, where it hangs in the spacious chapter-room—is chief among them; but there are many others hid away in dim chapels and sacristies to reward the search of those who like to discover such treasures for themselves. And meanwhile the great naves open to

the eye in noble vistas, lined with stately altars, adorned with carving, gilding, and metalwork, while sifting down through the frescoed domes and high, narrow windows come the rays of light that fall upon all the faded yet harmonious splendour, and make such pictures for the eye to dwell upon and the memory to recall as must strike the most careless observer.

But careless observers three at least of this party were not. It is true that for a day or two Philip proved much of a distraction, while Miss Graham frankly acknowledged that she had seen a sufficient number of churches and similar objects of interest to satisfy her for some time, the general fell in the most shocking manner into lounging and newspaper-reading, and Mr. Travers justified Dorothea's contemptuous opinion by developing, or relapsing, into a perfect example of the *flâneur*, idling in *portales* and plazas, accompanying Phil to the haunts of the gilded youth of Guadalajara, including the bull-ring, and generally declining from the high standard to which he had hitherto been held by the influence of precept and example. But Dorothea unhesitatingly declared that such a trio as Margaret, Russell, and herself were independent of the weak members who had forsaken them; and it was certainly no fault of hers if a single spot of interest in Guadalajara remained unexplored. What they enjoyed most, perhaps, were the wanderings which had no definite end in view, when sauntering along the streets, lined with houses painted in the light tints that seem in harmony with the brilliancy of the sunshine and atmosphere, their balustraded roofs outlined against the dazzling sky and their portals giving fascinating glimpses of courts filled with flowers, the white gleam of statuary and the musical voice of fountains, they would come upon some magnificent old structure that in its beauty and antiquity would be an object of pilgrimage in any other land than this.

Something of the pride of discoverers would fill them on these occasions. And such an occasion occurred one day when, after a visit to the market—where they had been enraptured by the scene upon which they entered, by its unexpected grace of architecture and bewildering excess of colour, they came out into the street where the market overflowed, and walking in a direction which promised soonest an escape from the crowd, turned into a quieter street, so quiet indeed that in the intensity of light which filled its length it seemed to have fallen asleep, and there found one of the most picturesque as well as one of the most ancient churches they had yet seen. A marvellous old structure it was, built of brown porphyry, with immense portals surrounded by elaborately sculptured columns, and closed by doors studded with great Spanish nails. The immense thickness of the walls showed in the deep arch of these doorways and the whole aspect of the edifice was of a strength on which time could make no impression save, perhaps, in the further mellowing of its exquisite tints. At one end rose a massive tower, at the other a Byzantine dome crowned the flat roof, and in a niche at the eastern corner a gigantic and most quaint statue of St. Christopher bearing the Divine Child upon his shoulder stood, carved out of the same brown stone of which the building is constructed. The doors were fast closed, and, as it stood in the brilliant sunshine with the stillness which brooded about its ancient wall, the old sanctuary seemed also fallen asleep and dreaming of better days. But that it remained dedicated to sacred purposes was evident from the fact that two or three men who passed while the trio of strangers stood lost in admiration, lifted their hats in reverence to the Sacramental Presence within. Finding entrance, however, impossible, the explorers were at length driven to pass around the western end in search of information. They had not much more than passed the walls—of somewhat narrow width, in comparison to their extreme length—when they found

themselves before the open doorway of a building immediately adjoining, through which there was a partial view of a large court surrounded by cloistered arches, that Dorothea at once declared were the most beautiful she had yet seen—so graceful, indeed, that she stood enthralled before the open portal.

"Oh, I wonder if we could go in!" she cried breathlessly. "Here comes a man. Ask him, Mr. Russell, pray ask him what this place is. It must be an institution of some kind—it is too large for a private house."

Thus adjured, Russell, addressing himself in courteous Spanish to a man who, wearing the draping cloak of an ecclesiastic, came out of the great doorway before which they were standing , asked the name and purpose of the building. The reply was equally courteous.

"It is our seminary, señor, for the education of young men who will become priests. I am sorry "—with a glance at the two feminine faces—"that I cannot ask you to enter; but the presence of ladies, as you are probably aware, is strictly forbidden in our seminaries."

"You are very kind, señor, hut the ladies were only admiring a glimpse of the cloisters," Russell replied. "And so this is your seminary. Has the building always been devoted to that purpose?"

"No. The señor has probably seen the large building near the cathedral, which was formerly our seminary. That was confiscated by the government and is now a school of art—so we house our pupils here, in what was formerly the convent of the Augustinian nuns. It is inconvenient for our purpose, but what will you?"—and slightly lifted hands and shoulders told the rest.

"But was not this property confiscated also?" Russell inquired.

"Naturally, señor—everything was taken. But when this was sold, it was bought for the purpose you see. The poor nuns—there are not many of them now—live in that house across the street yonder, whence they can at least see their old home and old church. Yes, the church belonged to the convent—Santa Monica is its name—one of the oldest in Guadalajara. The señor likes it? We think much of Santa Monica and it is very beautiful within. The señor and the señoras," including them with a sweet, quick smile, "should see it. In the morning it is always open for Masses."

Thanks were returned, salutations exchanged, and then they walked away, leaving their courteous informant still standing with his hat off, showing his finely outlined face and tonsured head. At the end of the block they came upon a beautiful garden with an overflowing fountain in the centre, once a secluded spot where the feet of the despoiled and banished nuns had paced, and where their hands had planted the great, spreading trees that now cast their shade over the traffic of a public plaza, instead of the still quiet of a convent close.

A little farther, another noble old church threatened to rival Santa Monica in their admiration—so beautiful was its façade sculptured in all manner of strange and rich designs, and crowned with splendid towers. This, they were told, was San Felipe, once with its accompanying buildings the home of the Oratorians.

Here they entered, to find one of the solemn, shadowy interiors, full of rich colour, of dark, harmonious tones, and incense-laden stillness, which are a delight alike to eye and spirit, falling on the last like the touch of a cool hand on a fevered brow. The details in most of these old churches are much the same, but no one who loves their infinitely picturesque beauty, their

deep religious charm, can ever grow weary of them. As the little group of strangers, penetrated by the deep calm and the aspect of dim splendour, moved softly down the open nave towards the spot where the dome soared in graceful beauty above the sanctuary with its burning lamps, they were met by an old man, who, seeing them at once to be *Americanos*, and (for a strange wonder) respectful to the house of God, paused and asked in a discreet whisper if he could do anything for them. He proved to be the sacristan, who, delighted by their appreciation of his dear church, led them into every nook and corner of it, including the sacristy, and told them of its ancient glories, when all the great buildings adjoining belonged to the sons of that gentle saint of Rome (St. Philip Neri) whose name it still bears. He grew indeed so eloquently pathetic, in contrasting these splendours of the past with the poverty of the present, that after they had parted with him, and found themselves again in the paved, sunshine-flooded atrium before the church, Mrs. Langdon remarked feelingly:

"To hear of so much spoliation and robbery makes one as sad as the beauty of these old sanctuaries delights one."

"To raise your spirits, I will show you that all is not destruction and desecration," said Russell. "You shall see the restoration of a church—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, no! If there is anything more dreadful than the destruction of one of these churches, it would be its restoration. How could the nineteenth century improve on the work of the sixteenth?"

"For the restoration of the church to which I allude there was not only excuse but necessity. It was the church of the Dominicans, and, besides being confiscated, was shattered in the last bombardment of the city. It has been purchased and restored in the most magnificent manner by an Association of St. Joseph."

"Anything new will seem terribly crude after this," said Dorothea, regarding the exquisitely mellow, time-stained, and richly-sculptured front of San Felipe.

"The two edifices are so different that you will not think of comparison," replied Russell. “Come!"

With some reluctance they turned in the direction he indicated, and a few minutes' walking brought them to the church of San José, which has risen, a miracle of splendour, from the war-demolished ruins of the ancient sanctuary of St. Dominic.

“It is like Solomon's Temple!" whispered Dorothea in a tone of amazement when, pausing inside the carved screens that protect the great open doors, they looked down the magnificent nave. "Nothing else could ever have been so splendid, so daring, so—almost barbaric, one would say if the effect were not perfect—in the use of gold and of colour. One could never have dreamed of it—and yet it is superb!"

She was right. A daring confidence in the ultimate result could alone have conceived the scheme of colour and decoration carried out with such triumphant success. The pale blue tint spread over the walls throws out in strong relief the deep crimson which forms an immediate background for the lavish decoration in gold. With the last the edifice literally burns. The deep, richly-carved frieze that surrounds the walls is covered with the precious metal, as is all the elaborate carving of the numerous altars; a golden rail divides the sanctuary from the nave, and the graceful pulpit with its echoing shell is an unrelieved mass of gold. The eyes are dazzled, yet the sense of harmony is never violated. Shrined in the majestic high altar is a statue of St.

Joseph—"El Señor San José," the people lovingly call him—executed by a Guadalajara sculptor, while the chapel of Our Lady is simply a poem of beauty in its dome delicately frescoed, its entire decoration in blue and gold, and its lovely statue.

It was when the trio finally issued, somewhat overwhelmed by the contemplation of so much magnificence, and walked across the flowery plazuela in front of the church, that Margaret Langdon said gravely: “I wish, Mr. Russell, that you who know this country so well would read a riddle for me. How is one to reconcile the two things that we have encountered so close together to-day— the ruthless spoliation of religious houses, the high-handed robbery which seized and retains all the property of the church, and the splendid generosity which pours out wealth like water to restore and adorn such a sanctuary as we have just seen?"

“In the answer to that question," Russell replied, "lies the whole history of Mexico, of the wars that desolated her for half a century, and the smouldering fires that burn under her placid surface now. The one great menace to her future peace, as it was the root of past bitterness and bloodshed, is the point you have touched. How, you ask, is one to read the conduct of a government which having robbed shamelessly, continues to persecute ruthlessly the religion which is held with passionate attachment by the vast mass of the people in whose name it professes to rule? Briefly, because this government, founded not on consent of the governed, but on the triumph of a party in war, while nominally republican in form is in reality as truly autocratic as that of Russia, and antagonizes the people on the most vital subject known to human society. These people, as you have seen with your own eyes, and as you will see, go where you will over the length and breadth of the country, are absolutely and devotedly Christian, yet they are represented before the world by a government every member of which belongs to a secret society inimical to Christianity, and which here, as in Latin Europe, scornfully tolerates and patronizes Protestant missionary societies because hoping to find in them allies against the only power it alike hates and dreads, the Catholic Church."

"Why do the people not rise and change things by force, if force alone can do it—for I heard you telling papa the other day what an absurd farce an election is here?" demanded Dorothea.

"Because they have tasted so fully and so deeply of the horrors of war, have seen their blood so poured out, their country impoverished and their credit destroyed, that they are willing to submit to much rather than invoke again the terrible arbitrament of the sword. Those who wish Mexico well can, therefore, only hope that, as the bitterness engendered by civil war subsides, a wise spirit of conciliation and just respect for the rights of others may lay the foundation of lasting peace in the land. With such a statesmanlike ideal the present President is credited, and unless it is realized patience cannot last for ever, and some day endurance will reach its limit and the flames of revolution break forth again."

"It might easily be if any one of these priests chose to play the part of Hidalgo," observed Margaret, looking at two of the cloak-draped figures on the other side of the street.

"You have no idea *how* easily," Russell replied. "A single word would be like flame to tow. But, so far from speaking that word, the chief efforts of the priests are directed towards keeping the people quiet by preaching patience and submission. 'It is *the* work which we have to do in the confessional,' said one of them once to me. Without the efforts of these admirable men—for such I have invariably found the clergy of Mexico—there would be war in the land to-

morrow. Not all its military force could keep the government in power without the aid of these auxiliaries, whom they reward with an unceasing persecution, as petty as it is vindictive."

"And short-sighted," added Mrs. Langdon;" for surely a broad-minded policy would dictate a liberal toleration at least, of that which appeals to the most vital feelings of the people. There is no government on earth strong enough to persistently and continuously outrage such feelings with impunity."

"As for me," said Dorothea calmly, "I should fight."

"You are not alone in that opinion," said Russell, smiling. "In my wanderings through the country I have come very near to the people, and again and again I have heard them say with flashing eyes when describing some persecution of the government, 'We ought to fight!' But the priests say, No. And on that No rests the peace of Mexico."

It was the next morning at breakfast that Philip inquired if the party were disposed for an excursion to San Pedro.

"Mr. Russell has arranged something for this morning, I believe," answered Dorothea, looking at that gentleman. “He says that it will interest us to see the Hospicio."

"A hospital!" exclaimed Miss Graham with a slight shudder. "Pray excuse me."

"It is likely that you may wish to be excused," said Dorothea. "But the place is not a hospital. It is—Mr. Russell can tell you what it is."

"Briefly," said Russell, "it is a house of charity in the most comprehensive sense; for under its roof is an orphan asylum, a school of useful arts for boys and girls, and a home for the aged poor."

"It certainly sounds comprehensive," said the general, "and no doubt is very admirable—but why do you think it would interest one?"

"Because it is such a magnificent affair altogether," answered his son before Russell could speak. "Oh, you must see the Hospicio by all means! It is one of the sights of Guadalajara that should on no account be omitted."

"You will accompany us, then?" asked Dorothea, turning to him.

She perceived a glance that passed between himself and Violet before he replied composedly: "Well, no. I saw it long ago, and Miss Graham may want me to act as her interpreter in some shopping she has on hand this morning."

"Violet will surely wish to go with us to see the Hospicio, since it is so well worth seeing," said Mrs. Langdon.

"I believe not," answered that young lady sweetly. "I am not partial to sight-seeing, as you know; and I confess that institutions of charity bore me dreadfully. I am like Dorothea in that particular."

"Pardon me," remarked Dorothea with dignity, "but I have never said that institutions of charity bore me. Industrial schools and things of that sort may not interest me as much as no doubt they should; but I would be very much ashamed of myself if I could not feel interest in a great and noble charity such as this must be."

"Live and let live!" said easy-going Philip. "Miss Graham and I frankly own that infant orphans and aged paupers don't interest us, even if they *are* housed in a palace fit for a king—and that you will find it to be."

"Is it a religious institution?" asked the general.

"It was," replied Russell. "What is there in Mexico, deserving of notice or admiration, which was not a religious foundation? But the Hospicio has, of course, been secularised, and is now in the hands of the state."

"Which takes great credit, I presume, for absolutely allowing the infant orphans and the aged paupers to remain in it," said Travers. "It has been long," the speaker went on meditatively, "since I have visited an institution of charity—contenting myself generally with attending bazaars and balls for their benefit—but an unwonted impulse of virtue stirs within me, and although I have rather been left out in the sight-seeing lately, I feel that, *con permiso*, as our friends here say, I should like to make one of the party this morning."

"For the matter of that," said the general, "I have been left out also—that is," as he caught his younger daughter's glance, "I have, like yourself, fallen off inexcusably. But we will both brace up and go and see the Hospicio."

In pursuance of this resolution the party, augmented by these two additions, set forth presently, with the understanding that they would go to San Pedro in the afternoon. There was a slight shadow on Dorothea's brow, caused perhaps by the absence of Philip and Miss Graham, and the apparently too great success of her efforts to distract the former from Mexican beauties by the charms of the latter; but it was impossible for clouds to overcast her horizon very long. Once out in the ineffable radiance of the sunshine, once surrounded by the picturesque sights of the streets and plazas, she forgot all cause of annoyance, and threw herself with her accustomed ardour into the things around her. They found it pleasant to avoid the tramway which would have conveyed them to the door of the Hospicio, and to walk down the long, straight street that leads towards the statue-crowned dome and portico with Tuscan columns, which close the vista. And it chanced that as they walked along, talking gaily, Mrs. Langdon suddenly paused by an open door in a blank wall.

"What a perfect picture of a Roman amphitheatre!" she exclaimed pointing within.

It was, indeed, a picture full of classic associations and suggestions. Across a court of entrance another portal was open, and beyond was a glimpse of an arena surrounded by stone seats, rising in tiers above a strong wall, also of stone, in which were set doors, out of which might have issued the wild beasts for the combats the Romans delighted in. But, instead of the lions and leopards of old, great bulls would charge forth from those doors to find a torturing death on the sand of the arena, even as their precursors died in the distant days of the Flavian Amphitheatre.

"It is the bull-ring," said Travers. "Come in and look at it. Since you are resolved never to witness the national sport, it is at least worth while to see the place devoted to it."

"Oh, yes!" said Russell. "Let us go in by all means."

He turned into the door, and they followed him across a court, where the dark-eyed family of the guardian of the place waved them courteously onward, mounted a flight of stone steps—everything about the building was solid as the Coliseum—and found themselves in a gallery overlooking the roofless arena.

"Let the gladiators enter!" said the general, seating himself. "I feel in so classic a frame of mind that I shall certainly turn down my thumbs when the time comes to decide whether the vanquished shall live or die."

"I don't think they allow the poor bull as much of a chance as that," said Dorothea, shuddering, as she gazed down into the arena where such scenes of sickening cruelty are enacted.

"How entirely the classic model has been preserved!" said Mrs. Langdon, looking around. “One might fancy one's self in one of the ancient theatres of Italy. Every feature is here, and the similarity of material makes the resemblance more striking."

"It proves, if proof were needed, how clearly these bullfights are derived from the gladiatorial shows of the ancients," said the general. "You have lately seen some of these—a—entertainments," he added, addressing Travers. “Are they quite as bad as they are represented to be?"

"They are terribly bad," that gentleman answered. "Yet the student of mankind, remembering the underlying brutality in all human nature, can comprehend the fascination of this sport for the multitude. The skill, grace, and courage of the toreador are the qualities to call forth popular enthusiasm, the possibility of danger in every encounter whets the interest to the highest point, and the savage fury of the goaded bull is a spectacle very stimulating to the nerves of those who are safe from its practical manifestations."

"It seems to have proved very stimulating to yours," said Dorothea. "You grow eloquent on the attractions of a bullfight."

"I am only analysing the attractions, as I analysed them after the spectacle," he replied. "At the time my sentiments struggled between an intense desire to give the poor, stupid, courageous bull one good chance at his tormentors, and to kick the audience individually and collectively."

"The things of which Travers speaks," said Russell, "the picturesqueness, and the skill and grace of the toreador, are redeeming features of the sport to any one who can overlook its cruelty. The spectacle of a prize-fight, which rouses multitudes to enthusiasm among us, has not even these features to redeem it. Consequently, living in a house of such brittle material, it does not become us to throw many stones at bullfighting."

"Only," said Dorothea, "in prize-fighting two brutes of equal intelligence are equally matched, while here the superior brute—the poor bull—has no chance at all."

"'Butchered to make a Roman holiday,'" quoted the general. "A gladiator or a bull—it would be the same. No, no, Russell, you and Travers cannot with your drapery of picturesqueness and skill and grace cloak the barbarity of the sport. It is indefensible; and the worst effect of it is the demoralisation of sentiment it must produce; the love of cruelty and bloodshed."

“Granted," replied Russell. “But when one has lived in many lands and seen much of national differences of custom and of human similarity underneath, one finds that there is not a great deal to choose between any of them, and one becomes tolerant of all. But, if the bull-ring disgusts you, come and let the Hospicio make amends."

The distance was not very great from the one to the other. A block or two farther, and they reached the classic portico which rises so imposingly above the stately flight of steps that lead to it. Admitted, they passed into a spacious court, shaded by orange-trees, around which

were grouped reception and class rooms. Here they met the lady in charge of the house since its secularisation by the government, and, after a courteous reception, were placed under the care of an assistant, appointed to show them all the details of this magnificent charity. Following their guide, they entered the different class-rooms opening from the court. Everywhere they found industry, cheerful faces, and the quiet of perfect order. The cool, lofty rooms were full of fresh air, floods of golden sunshine streamed in at the doors and windows, while the court beyond was as tranquil as it was beautiful, with its columns and glistening tiles, and fragrance of orange-blossoms. In one room a score of girls with dark, silky heads bent, and slender brown fingers busily at work, were fashioning artificial flowers—sprays of orange-blossoms that only lacked perfume to be as perfect as those blooming without. In another room another score were at work on fine needlework—the exquisite "drawn-work" of Mexico, taught long ago in the convents and handed down from generation to generation. In the drawing-room the pupils were drawing from casts with skill and fidelity, while their decorum and discipline were perfect. They sat unmoved, continuing their rapid strokes while the strangers paused behind their chairs, or only lifted dark-fringed, liquid eyes in a quick glance as they passed.

Their progress around the court finally ended in the *cor cordium* of the stately pile—the church. Admirably adapted by architectural design for the position it occupies as the centre of the vast building, it is in form a Greek cross, the four wide arms of which meet in a central space, forty feet in diameter, over which rises the light, elegant dome, a hundred and twelve feet in height, supported by eight columns and four noble arches, throwing the changing colours of its stained glass upon the shining pavement below. In one of the transepts of this beautiful sanctuary hangs a very fine portrait of the founder, his ascetic yet benignant Spanish face looking out of its canvas at the perpetuation through generations of the good work he originated.

"The illustrious Señor Dr. Don Juan Cruz Ruiz de Cabanas, Archbishop of Guadalajara," said their guide, as if introducing him.

"Properly called the founder," added Russell, "because to him is due the erection and endowment of the house, but its conception is said to have sprung from another and yet more illustrious man, the great archbishop Alcalde, who is remembered through generations as the supreme benefactor, hero, and saint of Guadalajara."

"Tell us about him!" said Dorothea quickly. "I have not heard of him before."

"Considering the number of his achievements, that is a very comprehensive request," replied Russell. "But at a more convenient time and place, I will be glad to gratify you."

"We now go this way," said their guide.

Passing across the polished pavement of the church, she opened a door and they found themselves in a second court, the whole interior of which was filled with trees and shrubs and carefully tended flowers, a very garden of delight, than which no royal palace could possibly contain anything more beautiful. As they paused with one accord to take in the charm of this exquisite spot, where no sound broke the spell of perfect stillness save the sweet notes of birds in the flowering branches of the trees, Dorothea sat down on the flight of stone steps leading from the door of the church, and by a gesture invited the others to follow her example.

"You will excuse us, señora," she said, meeting the surprised look of their guide, "but our friend" (indicating Russell) "wishes to tell us the history of some great archbishop, who was the

original founder of this house and the benefactor of Guadalajara, and I do not think a better place could be found in which to recount his good deeds."

"It is no doubt of *el santo*, the illustrissimo archbishop Alcalde, that the señor wishes to speak," said their attendant. "Ah, there is much to tell of him—so much that the sun might travel from east to west before it was all told."

"We do not expect to hear *all*" said Dorothea, glancing encouragingly at Russell—"only as much as can be related in a short space of time—"

"About as long as will suffice for the smoking of a cigarette," said Travers, producing a cigarette-case and box of matches from his pocket.

"Something," Dorothea went on with a rebuking glance at the speaker, "that will have the perfume of a great life, which we may always associate in memory with this charming spot."

"I perceive," said Russell, "that I shall be in excellent training for an Arabian story-teller by the time our expedition has ended. But, if it must be, know then that the good deeds of the illustrious archbishop Alcalde were indeed, as the señora has said, of such great number that to recount them in a limited space of time would be impossible. The history of his foundations alone is almost the history of Guadalajara. He founded the great Belen Hospital, which, as you, sir," addressing the general, "remarked yesterday, is in its conception a model of all a hospital should be; also the university and numerous colleges and schools, including several of the most admirable character for young women; he endowed scholarships in all these institutions; built the Santuario, the Sagrario, and many other churches and religious houses; improved prisons, helped prisoners, and, besides all this, his charity to individuals was so unbounded and munificent that, although he disposed of the most immense sums, he was often left without means."

"I should say," remarked Travers, "that it was rather because he disposed of immense sums that he was left without means. Unless a man has the purse of Fortunatus he can't build hospitals and universities and churches and any number of other things, and yet have money left to give away."

"In such cases," Russell proceeded, without noticing this interruption, while Dorothea frowned reprovingly at the interruptor, “he would give his clothes, jewels, books—anything and everything that he possessed—in order to relieve distress. As an illustration of this, a most charming story is told of him, which I think the señora here can probably relate better than I."

"You mean the story of the *alacrán*, señor?" asked the smiling señora, to whom he turned. “Oh, yes, every one knows that story, and the descendants of the person for whom the miracle was worked still live in Guadalajara. For it was a miracle," she added, turning with great simplicity to the others, "such as God often works through his saints to let us know how much he loves charity to his poor. But I think the señor, if he knows it, can best tell it to you, since my English is imperfect."

"The señora's English is excellent," said Russell; “but the story, as I have heard it, runs that one day a poor woman came to the good archbishop in the greatest distress, praying for aid to keep her children from starvation. It happened to be one of the occasions when the archbishop's resources had all been exhausted by the many demands for charity made upon him. He had absolutely nothing left to give her, yet to allow her to go away unrelieved was impossible. Not knowing what to do he looked up towards heaven with a prayer for help, when his glance suddenly fell upon an *alacrán*—which you know is a poisonous scorpion—crawling on the wall.

He at once walked up to it, took it in his hand, wrapped it in a piece of paper, and gave it to the woman, saying, 'Go to the pawnshop and borrow some money on this.' She looked at him in amazement, but she knew, as did all the people, that he was a saint, so she took the package and did as he bade her without a word. At the pawnshop the paper was opened and within was found an ornament of solid gold in the form of a scorpion, with two brilliant diamonds for eyes. On this she obtained money sufficient for her needs, and when she returned in a few days to thank the archbishop for his miraculous aid, he said: 'Do not thank me, my daughter. Thank Almighty God, who deigned to come to your aid by means of one of the humblest of his creatures. Now let us do our duty. Take this money, go again to the lender, redeem that animal, and bring it back to me.' Again she did as ordered and brought the redeemed ornament back to the archbishop. He took it in his hand, went to the wall, placed the shining golden pin where he had first seen the *alacrán*, and said, softly and sweetly, 'Walk again, my brother.' And the scorpion proceeded to walk again on his interrupted way."

"Oh!" cried Dorothea with shining eyes, "could anything be more exquisite? Not in the Italian legends, not in the lovely stories told of St. Francis of Assisi, is there anything more beautiful! Yes, he was a saint indeed, that man, with a heart like the very heart of God."

"And it speaks well for the hearts of the people that they hold such a story in loving remembrance," said Margaret.

"Very charming story certainly," said the general. "But now I think we had better move on, for these steps are rather hard and cold."

So, rising, they moved on around the court with its greenness and stillness and fragrance, the sky like a vault of lapis lazuli looking down into this "garden enclosed." Opening on each side were the refectories—on the right for girls, on the left for boys. These immense rooms were as cool, airy, and spotlessly clean as all the other apartments, as the great kitchen with its glazed surfaces everywhere reflecting the light, from which they carried away a picture of half a dozen slender girls under the superintendence of an older woman preparing dinner, and of great piles of fresh, green vegetables lying on dark-red, shining tiles; or as the dormitories with floods of glorious sunshine pouring into their spacious lengths on delicately-tinted walls and rows of pure white beds. Then came the workshops, where trades are taught, such as weaving, printing, binding, shoemaking, and where all the work of the house is done by its inmates; a department where little children rose up in their cribs and smiled at the intruders, and yet another where old people sat in the sunshine with an air of tranquil content. Court followed court—there are more than twenty in all— each with its surrounding apartments forming a world in itself, and altogether making a true Hospice, or House of God in the old mediaeval sense, where from the infant castaways of human society to the aged travellers of life for whom the world offers no other home, all who need help may enter and find not only shelter and food, but such beautiful and stately surroundings as only the great ones of the earth command elsewhere.

"It is a noble—a most noble charity!" said the general impressively, after they had been through all its various departments. "A grand conception, grandly carried out."

"What I like best of all," said Travers, "is that here charity is not associated with ugliness. If I ever found an institution of the kind, this shall be my model. I shall house my paupers in lofty, frescoed apartments, opening on spacious courts filled with flowers."

"It all springs from the Christian conception of the people," said Russell. "They look upon the poor as the representatives of Christ on earth. We regard them as criminals, to be put out of sight and condemned to all things cold, hard, and ugly, because they have failed in man's first duty—that of amassing wealth. Our boasted civilisation may well come to Mexico to learn more than one lesson."

"I shall never forget this," said Dorothea, pausing at the door to look back over the orange-shaded court, at the farther end of which rose the façade and soared the noble dome of the church. "It is a poem of charity—a palace, indeed, for the poor ones of God."

Palace at Guadalajara

When the booming stroke of three o'clock roused the city from its midday siesta—that trance of suspended activity which, like enchantment, overtakes all busy life in Mexico for three hours every day—when the doors of business houses unclosed and street cars resumed running, the party, including Miss Graham and Philip, set forth to take the first car leaving the city for San Pedro. Mexican tramways, as a rule, are admirable. The lively, active mules, driven tandem fashion, gallop along at a fine rate of speed, the cars are clean, open, and, according to price, first and second class. There is an exhilarating sense, impossible to connect with tramways in any other part of the world, in being whirled through busy city streets, while the driver's horn announces to all whom it may concern to clear the way, or in being borne with smoothness and rapidity along a picturesque country road.

Very picturesque is the road from Guadalajara to San Pedro, after the city gates are left behind. The broad, white highway, along one side of which the tramway has been laid, is lined with magnificent *fresnos* (a fine variety of ash), their immense trunks, their gnarled roots, and

broad green crowns of foliage rivalling in beauty the most kingly oak. Underneath their mighty shade, along the wide road six inches deep in finely powdered dust, a stream of wayfarers constantly pass—men bearing great piled-up packs upon their backs, their white *calsones* rolled up to their knees, showing lean, brown, sinewy legs; women hardly less heavily laden wrapped in their Oriental drapery; troops of patient, plodding burros; cavaliers in picturesque silver-laced riding-dress, on small fiery horses that show in every line their Arabian blood, and now and then a handsome carriage filled with a bevy of ladies. It is an epitome of the life of the country that flows along this broad avenue lined with its noble trees.

The ascent to the ridge on which San Pedro lies is very gradual, the view over the wide plain to the distant mountains most beautiful, and the town when readied reveals itself as wrapped in a quiet extraordinary even for a suburban village—the quiet of a watering-place out of season. Except in summer few people of the better class live here; and there are whole streets of houses closed and deserted. Quite unsuggestive are the blank walls and barred, shuttered windows of these houses; but seen in the season when the whole place is filled and alive with gaiety, they reveal beautiful courts and gardens, and, without pretensions to stateliness, are very attractive.

But if this little "summer town" of the elite of Guadalajara is known beyond its narrow borders, if it is a spot towards which the steps of the tourist invariably turn, the cause must be found in the very remarkable work done by some of the humblest of its inhabitants. Here are modelled the wonderful and delicate little figures in clay which may be seen from the City of Mexico to El Paso and San Antonio. Marvellous is the plastic art which they display, these studies of the life of the people in all its picturesque phases, wrought with a fidelity to Nature and a perfection of workmanship which would be remarkable if they came from the hands of trained and accomplished sculptors, instead of from the fingers of uneducated peasants, pure Indians, whose genius and skill, handed down from father to son, have not raised them above the poorest of their class. In this art there is nothing of imagination; it is all the purest realism—but such realism! On a bit of clay no larger than a man may hold in his hand the modeller falls to work, and lo! there starts to vivid life the toreador in his most spirited and graceful attitude as he springs before the bull, or the *aguador* with his water-jars, the *leñador* with his faggots, the *cargador* with his great pack upon his shoulders, every type of the varied trades and occupations of the country produced with startling exactness to life and an artistic instinct which is never at fault. Not only is every detail of anatomy perfect in these miniature figures, every fold of costume and badge of trade, but the expression of the tiny faces is simply marvellous. No one who knows anything of art but must stand amazed before them; for there is no more artistic work of its kind in the world.

"It is only another manifestation of the remarkable genius of the people," said Russell, in reply to the surprise expressed by his companions. "I know of no other people who possess anything like the same genius in such universal degree. From the vessels which are fashioned in remote villages for the common uses of the household to the stone-carving and frescoing which adorn the churches, all their work has an artistic value; and the deep, untaught artistic spirit shows in many ways of which as yet you have seen nothing."

"We have seen enough to excite wonder and admiration," said Mrs. Langdon. "Nothing, I am sure, can exceed this work in delicacy, skill, and fidelity to Nature. It is strange that sculptors

such as the world has not seen since the days of the ancient Greeks have not sprung from a race so gifted."

"Education is all that is needed to produce them," said Russell. "And that will come. Meanwhile, turn from the figures for a little time and look at this beautiful ware. Here are some perfect examples of the famous Guadalajara pottery."

They were indeed beautiful, the jars and water-bottles to which he directed attention. Ashes of roses in tint, this ware is soft-baked and unglazed, but polished and elaborately decorated in colour, gold, and silver. Absolutely trifling in cost are the finest specimens; and the temptation to purchase overpowered the party to such an extent that Philip finally suggested that if a halt was not called a freight-car would be necessary to convey their luggage. "You know," he said, "that you must have all this stuff packed by the people here. They understand how to do it. But if you attempt it yourselves—especially if you put any in your trunks—you will have only fragments when you reach home."

"There is one thing we must not forget," said Russell. "Panduro, the most noted of these artists, models likenesses admirably. Give him a sitting, and he will produce for you a miniature bust absolutely perfect in features and expression. Who will test his skill in this manner?"

"Papa, of course," said Dorothea promptly. "He will be a very good subject. People of strong character always come out best in sculpture."

"In most other things also," remarked Travers, who was standing in contemplation of a wonderful realistic group—a burro laden with charcoal sacks, and his accompanying *carbonero*, a boy with ragged *sombrero* pushed back from such a face as Murillo loved to paint, whip in grimy hand on which one almost seemed to see the charcoal dust, and sandals on the bare, brown feet. "I must have this also," he said as if to himself. "That urchin is irresistible. Were you not observing, Miss Dorothea, that only people of strong character are good subjects for modelling? Who, then, could be a better sitter for Panduro than yourself?"

"Do you really think that I am a person of strong character?" asked Dorothea with an air of innocence. "I wish I could agree with you; but I fear there is no doubt that I am neither a person of strong character nor yet a good subject for Panduro. Papa, now, or Margaret—"

"Or Miss Graham," suggested Philip, glancing at that young lady's faultless profile.

"What does one have to do?" asked she doubtfully.

"Only sit still and be looked at," said Travers. "Something to which you are too well accustomed to find disagreeable."

Russell meanwhile turned to one of the attendants in the shop, and asked if Panduro could be seen.

"He is at his own house, señor," was the reply, "but we will send for him. In a few minutes he will attend upon you."

"Why should we not go to his house?" asked Russell, turning to the others. "I think it would interest you to see him in his own workshop."

There was a general murmur of assent. "An artist's studio is always interesting!" cried Dorothea—and the shopman offering no objection, but on the contrary assuring them that Panduro would be honoured by their visit, they set forth.

Out of the fashionable quarter and into the humbler portion of San Pedro they went, leaving sidewalks and frescoed houses for streets which were mere roadways, lined by the low

adobe dwellings of the poor. Miss Graham made a grimace as she lifted her skirts of delicate fawn-coloured cloth and looked at Philip.

"I really can't see why we should be dragged here when the man could so readily have come to us!" she said plaintively. To which Philip replied: "Russell is certainly a most thoroughgoing cicerone. He is not satisfied with showing you only the surface of things."

“He is terribly thoroughgoing," she assented with a sigh. "And Dorothea is worse. She will leave *nothing* unseen if she can help it. Now I think that in travel there is so much in knowing what to leave unseen—don't you?"

Philip laughed. "Not a doubt of it," he answered. "Only it is rather difficult to draw the line—one might end in leaving everything unseen, you know."

"Well, you must confess that we should not have lost much if we had left *this* unseen," she said, with somewhat caustic emphasis as, following the advance guard of the party, they passed through a gateway in an adobe wall, and entered a large, unpaved, well-swept enclosure.

On one side a wide shed, with roof of bamboo canes, on which tiles were laid, formed a pleasant shelter before the front of a dwelling built against the enclosing wall, and of the same sun-dried brick. Orange-trees were growing in the court, and the flowers that Mexicans passionately love were filling the air with their fragrance. Two or three great climbing roses were rioting over the house and the rough wall near by, and the whole place was full of an exquisite picturesqueness, of the poverty that is not divorced from beauty and which has no affiliation with squalor.

It was an example of the different manner in which different eyes may regard the same objects that even as Miss Graham was uttering her scornful comment, Mrs. Langdon was saying to Russell, "I would not have missed this for anything! How charming it is! — and how scrupulously clean!"

"You will seldom find the poorest *jacal* otherwise," said Russell. "Cleanliness and neatness are such general Mexican virtues that their absence is always remarkable. But there is something very charming about the aspect of this place, when one thinks of it as the home of an artist—a true artist, however humble."

"The most fastidious of great artists could find nothing here to which to object," said she. "There is nothing ugly, nothing sordid, nothing to jar on the artistic sense; only an atmosphere of simplicity in which true art might readily find itself at home."

While speaking they had crossed the open space and approached the house, where a woman seated outside the door rose to meet them. In appearance and attire she was as neat as her dwelling. Panduro, she said in answer to Russell's inquiry, was in his work-room, but she would send for him. Meanwhile would the señoras and señores do her the honour to sit down—and she began to bring out chairs.

But Russell, speaking with the utmost courtesy, begged her not to trouble herself. If permitted they would prefer to go to Panduro in his work-room. It was for this they had come. Would she take them there?

“He will take you himself, señor—it is but a moment until he comes. Go!" to a child standing by, "and tell thy father to come quickly!"

"What glorious roses!" said Dorothea, looking up at the perfect buds of pure gold above her head.

"The señorita would like some?" said the woman, understanding the glance if not the words, and she began to gather all that were within reach.

She was distributing these with graceful impartiality, when across the open court came Panduro himself. A perfect specimen of the native race, which for lack of a better term we call Indian, is this sculptor of San Pedro. Nor does he make the least attempt in dress or manner to separate himself from the humble class to which he belongs, a class not humble on account of its Aztec blood— for that is no bar to social advancement in Mexico—but from its extreme and generally hopeless poverty. In the slender brown fingers of this man dwells the plastic art which more than any other has made some of the sons of men famous with an undying fame; but neither for him, nor for those of his compatriots whose artistic achievements almost equal his own, has it brought more than the poor wages paid for common toil.

“Why doesn't he ask something that could be called a price for such remarkable work?" demanded the general irritably, when they had been led across the tree-shaded court to the workshop, where with the simplest possible equipment the modeller plied his trade, and where around the walls of the bare but clean interior were shelves filled with the marvellous little figures and miniature busts which had lately left his hand.

"It seems a pity that some one does not advise him to raise his prices," said Travers. "Fancy paying only a few *reales* for such a bit of work as this *aguador* wheeling his water-jars!"

"It is likely that he knows better than you what his market will bear," said Russell, "although the prices are certainly ridiculous for the work. But human labour is unfortunately the only thing which is cheap in Mexico."

“Look here!" cried Dorothea, suddenly darting across the apartment with a spirited figure of a toreador in her hand.

"This was modelled by Panduro's son, a boy of twelve years old. Isn't it wonderful? Why does not some one send this child to Italy, to be educated into a great sculptor?"

So examining, wondering, and pleasing the modeller much by their enthusiastic appreciation of his work, they spent an hour or two in this humble atelier, full of the charm of true art and making in itself a picture they were not likely to forget, with flowers and glistening orange boughs gently stirring in the golden air outside, while the whole scene breathed a tranquillity and content, undefinable yet distinct as perfume. It was necessary for Russell more than once to remind them that time and tramways wait for no one, before they could tear themselves away. Then, having made an appointment for the modelling of a bust of the general, and loading themselves with delicate graceful little figures, they finally took their departure, escorted by Panduro, his wife, and whole family, as far as the gateway.

"Now," said Miss Graham with a feeling accent, as they again tramped along the dusty road, "I suppose we shall go to see some churches. It is, of course, impossible that we could be allowed to come to any place and not have to see its churches!"

Dorothea, who overhead this remark, looked around with a laugh. "Don't be uneasy, Violet," she said. "For once we are not going to see any churches. To reach Guadalajara before dark we must take the next car that leaves the plaza."

"But we can return and see the churches," remarked Philip cheerily. "It would be too bad to disappoint Miss Graham, and establish the precedent of leaving them unseen."

Miss Graham's reply was lost, for at that moment they came in sight of the plaza, where a car was apparently on the point of departure, and with a shout Philip dashed down the street to detain it. As speedily as possible the others followed, and, climbing breathlessly into the open seats, were soon whirling along as fast as the mules could gallop towards the city, which lay before them in shining beauty on its green plain. Sweet fresh airs came to meet them, blowing on their faces with a touch as if they had come from immeasurable distance over wide leagues of space; rich fires of sunset were burning in magnificent resplendency above the western mountains, flooding the whole landscape with a glow of marvellous colour, in which the picturesque highway with its noble trees and passing figures, the wide outspread fields, and the city with its ivory towers and gleaming domes, were less like reality than a dream of some fair and wonderful country, some city builded of pearl and jasper, in a poet's dream.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XI.

THE BARRANCA DE PORT1LLO.

"LEAVE Guadalajara without seeing the Barranca de Portillo!" exclaimed Philip. "Nonsense!—it's not to be thought of!"

"But what is the Barranca de Portillo?" asked Miss Graham with an air of apprehension. "If it is a deserted monastery, or an institution of charity, or—anything of that kind—I must beg to be excused."

"A barranca," said Philip with praiseworthy gravity, "is altogether an institution of Nature. Man has no part in it, except that in the present instance he has constructed a road by means of which one descends into it. "

"Descends?"

"Yes. It is two thousand feet deep—a great rift in the earth's surface. By Jove!" added the speaker with sudden energy, "you would know something about barrancas if you were a civil engineer in Mexico, especially on the line of road which we have been endeavouring to survey between here and the coast. The route to San Blas has proved impracticable solely on account of barrancas."

"A barranca," said the general, "is simply, I believe, a cañon."

“About the same thing," replied his son. "Connoisseurs in cañons and barrancas may be able to point out some minor differences, but they are imperceptible to the ordinary observer. Called by whatever name you please, they are amazingly picturesque, when regarded from the point of view of the artist rather than the railroad man. And there is none more picturesque or better worth seeing than the Barranca de Portillo, near this place."

"Of course, then, we must see it," said Dorothea with her accustomed decision. "What do you mean exactly by 'near'?"

"I mean that it is a day's excursion," replied Philip. "And we must start early in order to manage it. Leave all details to me—only prepare yourselves for some of the most picturesque and novel experiences which you have yet had in the country."

"Good!" cried Dorothea. "Picturesque and novel experiences are just what we are in search of."

The general, however, looked a little grave. Evidently he was only in search of picturesque and novel experiences when they could be combined with a reasonable degree of comfort; and he saw reason to apprehend that in this plan of exploring a barranca the element of comfort might be lacking. .But it was apparent that a strong majority was arrayed against him —that in fact he could only count upon Miss Graham for support in any attempt at opposition— so he expressed himself as willing to make the excursion, begging only that Philip would kindly bear in mind that he was not in charge of a party of engineers, but of peaceful tourists—

Here a cry of expostulation arose. "Papa!" cried Dorothea, "if you call us tourists, I shall insist upon going home at once."

"But, what the deuce!" replied the general. "We *are* tourists."

"No, papa," said his eldest daughter mildly but firmly; "we are *travellers*. There is a great difference."

' Well, I hope Phil will kindly remember, then, that we are travellers" said the general with sarcastic emphasis, "and not a party of railroad men, inured like soldiers to hardship."

"I'll remember, sir," replied his son laughing. "I'll telegraph to Atemajac for the mildest burros to be found in the country. You know it is the regulation thing to do the barranca on burros."

“Burros!" said the general in a tone of questioning dismay.

"Burros!" repeated Miss Graham with an accent of horror.

"Burros—how delightful!" cried Dorothea.

"Burros, to be sure," said Philip. "Why not? Does not every one who goes to the East ride donkeys? And why shouldn't we be Oriental and picturesque too? Besides, they are one of the chief elements of amusement. The excursion would not be half so hilarious but for them."

"Hum!" said the general. "I confess that I have doubts of this hilarious affair. But arrange it in the usual manner, and we will go through with it—if we can."

This heroic spirit of endurance did not seem to promise much pleasure to be derived from the hilarious affair in question; but not even the most foreboding soul could resist the exhilarating effect of the early day, of the contagious gaiety of the more volatile members of the party, and of the prospect of agreeable adventures ahead, as they were whirled by tramway the next morning out of the gates of Guadalajara and carried at a rapid rate down grade towards the stream-fed valley where lies the town of Atemajac.

All around them as they rolled onward lay the wide, undulating plain, bathed in brilliant sunshine, the distant mountains clothed in sparkling mist, while seen across some leagues of intervening distance, a mass of buildings crowned by a noble dome marked the spot where the famous monastery of Zapopan once flourished, the first Franciscan foundation and most revered sanctuary in Nueva Galicia, now a melancholy ruin—the monastery a barracks, the cloisters deserted, the great courts silent as death, the dependent village with roofless houses falling to decay! Presently the tramway descended to the banks of a stream, passed some pretty baths,

where blue, limpid pools seemed to invite a plunge, and finally, entering the town of Atemajac, came to a halt before the large iron gates of a green, park-like enclosure, where a fountain played in the middle distance, and the façade of an imposing building was visible through foliage at the farther end. This, Dorothea remarked, was no doubt either the summer residence of some grandee—probably the Governor of the State—or a great public institution.

"On the contrary, it is a great private institution," said Philip. "These are the mills of Atemajac, where very excellent cotton goods are manufactured. Pretty place, isn't it? A band plays here on Sunday afternoons, and it is a favourite point of excursion from Guadalajara."

"This is the country I have been in search of all my life!" said Dorothea fervently. "A country where ugliness does not exist, where even such prosaic and in other countries hideous things as mills are invested with beauty and charm!"

"I wonder if the people have the least idea how favoured they are in these picturesque environments?" observed Travers.

"I suppose not. Contrast is necessary to teach us the value of everything."

"Very true," said Philip. "And meanwhile here are the burros awaiting us."

The burros were indeed standing by awaiting whatever burdens Fate might have in store for them, with that air of long-eared patience peculiar to their race. But it must be admitted that even the heart of Dorothea sank with a sense of dismay when she saw that they were only equipped with packsaddles, on which presumably the riders were expected to perch and balance themselves as best they could. All eyes turned from the animals to the general, and the general justified the universal expectation by exploding.

"If you call this a joke," he said with indignation to his son, "I consider it a very poor one—to bring us out here with the idea that we would attempt to ride these ridiculous donkeys on pack-saddles! There is nothing to do but return. Here!—hi!—" motioning wildly to the conductor of the tramcar which began to move off towards Guadalajara—"Russell, tell that fellow to stop and wait for us!"

"No, no!" cried Philip, divided between laughter and concern. "Let him go. There will be another car presently, if you insist upon giving up the excursion. But let us first reason upon the matter. And to begin with, I assure you that nothing was further from my intention than to perpetrate a joke, or the ghost of a joke, upon you. Nobody here rides burros except on pack-saddles. Russell, why don't you tell them that it is so? They will believe anything that you say."

Thus adjured, Russell, subduing his own amusement, addressed the general. "It is quite true, sir," he said. "But Phil must excuse me if I say that, had I been arranging the excursion, I should not have thought of burros at all. Horses or mules would carry us better, and descend the barranca quite as easily."

"Certainly they would," said the general with emphasis. "Let those animals be taken away and horses or mules brought."

"It is all very well to say, like an Eastern pasha, 'Let it be done,'" replied Philip, "but you might as well demand camels and dromedaries while you are about it. They could be brought quite as easily—in Atemajac."

"Are there no livery stables here?" asked the general, glancing around vaguely and loftily.

"Livery stables!" repeated Philip. "Mr. Russell's process of education in matters Mexican is not so thorough as I imagined. But I think we had better take the next car back to Guadalajara, and let him arrange the excursion after his ideas. I perceive that I am a failure as a guide."

It was at this point that the first serious friction in the party was on the point of occurring, when Dorothea threw herself into the breach. In the first place, as she said afterwards to her sister, she could not endure to see Philip snubbed, not even for Mr. Russell; and in the second place, the desire for adventure began to overcome the dismay with which she had on first sight viewed the pack-saddles.

"Papa," she cried, "Phil has done the best for us, no doubt, and if other people go to the barranca on burros why cannot we? At least let us try. There is always the alternative of turning back. But to give up at once, without making an effort to go anywhere or see anything—I, for one, am totally opposed to that!"

She looked at Travers with a compelling glance, under the influence of which he said with decision:

“So am I. My vote is to give the burros a trial. We are in search of novel experiences, I believe, and it will not do to slight one which promises to be so novel as this."

"There is a limit to what is agreeable in novelty," said the general. "But we will let the majority decide. What do you say, Margaret?"

As if there was any doubt what Margaret would say! To secure peace and please others, she would have declared that she was ready to ride a Bengal tiger. So Russell thought as he glanced at her with a smile, while the reply he looked for came.

"I say with Dorothea," she answered, "that what other people have done we can surely do. I am willing to try the donkeys and pack-saddles."

"Now don't you say No," urged Philip, turning to Miss Graham, on whose countenance extreme repugnance was depicted. "You have no idea how easy riding is on one of these saddles until you try it."

"I am perfectly certain that I shall fall off at once," she said with conviction. "How can one sustain one's self on a flat surface, without pommel, or stirrup, or bridle?"

"Anybody can ride with all those appurtenances," replied Philip; "but only people who are supremely graceful can look well on a pack-saddle. I am sure you will look charming, and, as for falling off, I will ride beside you and see that that does not occur. Come, let me put you on this gray burro! He is the best looking of the lot."

Flattery had its effect, and Miss Graham allowed herself to be lifted to the back of the gray burro, who twitched his fuzzy ears meditatively, as if wondering what new form of freight this might be which emitted little shrieks and insisted on a rope being tied around his neck, which when clutched convulsively threatened him with strangulation.

"Do you know," Dorothea, who had meanwhile mounted, confided to Travers, “I am conscious of an admiration greater than I ever felt before for those circus riders who were the delight of my childhood, and who perform such amazing feats on saddles like these. One can gauge the difficulty of standing erect, jumping through hoops and so on, when one finds how hard it is just simply to preserve one's balance sitting. But the worst part of the matter is to have no means of controlling the movements of the animal. Now look at my donkey! Where do you suppose he is going?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Travers, who was convulsed with laughter at the scene which the whole party presented as they were helplessly borne along in a confused mass at the will of the small, obstinate animals that pushed and rubbed against each other with an absolute disregard of the wishes of their riders, while the attendants on foot—two men and a boy—ran after them, expostulating and prodding. In this struggling and irregular fashion they crossed the stone bridge which spans a stream along the banks of which great trees and all manner of pleasant bushes and green grass make a delightful picture for the eyes; and thence passing through the dusty streets of the village came out into the open country beyond, where the spreading leagues of the great plain seemed almost boundless as they stretched away towards the ethereal beauty of the mountains that lay in azure masses on the far horizon, where the vast sky above was a vault of stainless sapphire, and Guadalajara, seen in the distance, was more than ever like a dream city in its fairness. They passed picturesque villages, mills fortified like castles with high walls and loopholed towers, they forded clear, bright streams, in the course of which Miss Graham uttered screams of apprehension and had to be supported on her not very secure seat by Philip's arm—a proceeding which Dorothea viewed with unqualified scorn and disgust. These sentiments were perhaps useful in diverting her mind from apprehension on her own account, for that there was ground for apprehension no one could dispute, since a single misstep of the burros on the rocky bottom would have been sufficient to insure their riders a serious wetting, even if they had not been unseated.

"By Jove!" said the general, "I feel exactly as if I were mounted on a Newfoundland dog! It is cruelty, positive cruelty, for a man of my weight to attempt to ride one of these diminutive creatures. And how they are to carry us twelve miles and back is more than I can tell."

“I think that I shall get down and walk for a while," observed Mrs. Langdon. "It will relieve both the donkey and myself."

"No," said Philip, overhearing the remark. "Don't get down now. Wait until we reach the mouth of the barranca. It is very likely that you will prefer to walk a little then."

"That sounds," remarked Russell, "as if walking might then be a necessity, so I advise you to keep your seat at present."

Notwithstanding all that they had been told of the nature of a barranca, there was a surprise for those who had never before seen one of these stupendous earth-rifts when after riding for several miles across the level plateau they came suddenly upon some huge masses of rock, forming a veritable mouth, through which their road passed and plunged at once into a vast chasm that yawned before them as if the earth had been violently rent asunder by some great convulsion of Nature.

"Is this the barranca?" said Dorothea, pausing with astonishment. "It looks as if it might lead to the Inferno. Did you think"—turning to Russell—"that we were going down into the very bowels of the earth?"

"Oh, yes," replied that gentleman cheerfully. "And I believe we shall find a Paradise instead of an Inferno when we get down there, so don't be dismayed."

"Dismayed?—I!" Her glance said how far from likely that was. "But I want to know"—surveying the wild grandeur of the scene before them—"what has produced this wonderful thing. An earthquake?"

Her brother pointed to the head of the deep cañon, where the sunlight flashed upon a stream of water that leaped over the edge in a long, narrow fall, above which a rainbow constantly hovered. "There is the agent," he said.

Dorothea, however, viewed this agent with incredulity. "It is impossible," she said. “The cause is too disproportioned to the effect. That small stream could never have worn out this stupendous chasm."

“In the first place," replied Philip, "that stream is not as small as it looks. We see it from a considerable distance and contrasted with immense precipices. In the second place, you must remember that in the rainy season it is swollen to a raging flood, and also that this work has been accomplished during the course of ages which we cannot calculate."

But Dorothea was not the only person who was incredulous. The general also shook his head. "I don't pretend to be scientific," he observed, “but it is certain that the whole of Mexico is of volcanic formation, and in the tremendous upheavals and convulsions which must have gone on here at some period I can see no reason why these chasms might not have been formed, rather than by the slow action of water."

"That slow action is, nevertheless, the most irresistible force in Nature," said Russell. "And the water is here to answer for itself."

But Philip made an airy gesture of the hand. "Those who prefer to believe in the action of volcanic forces are at liberty to do so," he said. "They are certainly more sensational and striking in effect than the slower wearing away of water; and some people like even their science to be dramatic. But the day wears on, and we are losing time. *Vamos*!"

The burros, who knew the word, shook their long ears in melancholy fashion and started forward. But an altogether unlooked-for and agreeable surprise was in store for them. The road which descends into the barranca, winding along its great wall for five or six miles, and suspended, as it were, between heaven and earth, with precipices that the eye cannot measure above and below, is one of those achievements of human skill which recall to mind the great Roman roads that, surmounting all natural obstacles, are in their durability the wonder of succeeding ages. Of like durability seems this road through the Barranca de Portillo. Paved in the most lasting manner, so that no floods can wash or destroy it, its outer edge is guarded by a stone parapet to protect travellers from the danger of falling into the yawning gulf below, while winding constantly, in order to obtain the grade necessary to enable man or beast to climb the stupendous heights, there is not a hundred feet of level way upon it, and its steepness is generally at an incline of hardly less than forty-five degrees. Now, to descend such an incline seated on a flat saddle, without pommel, stirrup, or bridle, is a feat of which few persons are capable; and so it chanced that one after another of the riders slipped to the ground and let their relieved and no doubt astonished animals go clattering unburdened down the steep way.

And what a marvellous way it was to those who looked upon it for the first time, and to whom it was full of the freshest novelty as well as the wildest charm! With the certain exception of Miss Graham and the possible exception of the general, no one was sorry to be relieved of the distraction of endeavouring to maintain an impossible seat and to wander at leisure and on foot down this wonderful passage into the heart of the earth.

"I know we shall be worn out, and tired to death!” complained Miss Graham. “It is just as I expected!” growled the general. “Those infernal donkeys are of no use at all when they are

needed most!" But no one heeded these malcontents. Indeed, it is doubtful if any one save Philip (to whom barrancas were no novelty) heard them. The others were so absorbed in admiration and delight that they had no thought to spare for possible fatigue. Every step upon the winding road, every turn around the jutting walls of the great cliffs, was a new revelation of the most picturesque beauty. Higher and higher above them, as they descended deeper, rose the towering heights, until their summits seemed to touch the sky, which finally became no more than a strip of turquoise far above, while from the outer edge of the parapet-guarded road precipices broken, scarred, riven, dropped to the remote, unseen depths below. Forming the opposite wall of this mighty yet narrow gulf, for it is not more than a quarter of a mile wide, were stern cliffs of porphyritic rock, absolutely precipitous, corrugated, devoid of water or vegetation, bare and forbidding as if they frowned upon a desert. But, to compensate for their barrenness, all the mineral dyes of Nature seemed lavished upon their Titanic sides, painting them in reds and purples which took the most wonderful hues from the atmosphere whenever a turn of the road permitted a momentary glimpse into the distance. For the rarity of these distant glimpses the gazers were consoled by the enchanting picturesqueness of the scenes immediately surrounding them. Out of the immense broken masses of rock which line the inner side of the road, springs of water constantly gush forth, creating a moisture which covers the face of the cliffs with ferns, mosses, shrubs, and trees in the most abounding variety of verdure. In these damp, shady recesses plants which no botanist has ever classified may be found, together with others of the greatest rarity. Draped with this lovely mantle of greenery, the great heights offer at every turn pictures of grandeur so overwhelming and beauty so exquisite that their charm penetrates the soul with that deep rapture, familiar to the true lover of Nature, which Wordsworth alone among poets has ever fitly expressed in words. And, while the eye is thus delighted, the musical sound of falling water is never out of the ear, now only a delicate, trickling murmur, then the tumultuous pouring of some cascade as it tumbles in fairy-like whiteness down the rocks, and, crossing the road, disappears over the outward edge of the precipice to make its impetuous way to the stream that flows far below.

"Mr. Russell," cried Dorothea, turning suddenly to that gentleman, "you have been everywhere and seen everything in the world worth seeing; tell me is there any cañon or pass anywhere more wildly and wonderfully beautiful than this?"

"If so, I have never seen it," Russell replied. "But why think of other scenes when this is so absolutely satisfying, and has no need of a 'remoter charm' or a remoter comparison to enhance its beauty?"

"Why, indeed?" asked Margaret Langdon. She looked like a girl herself, with her eyes shining under her broad-brimmed hat, a delicate colour in her usually pale cheeks, and her hands full of ferns she had gathered from the rocks. The very spirit of Nature seemed to have entered into her. There was an exhilaration in the stupendous grandeur, the wild freshness of the scenes, which a spirit sensitive and responsive as the strings of a violin could not but feel. “What difference can it make," she said, "whether or not there are other places in the world more beautiful? For myself, I can think of nothing but what is before our eyes—this marvellous, enchanted, incredibly lovely place!"

"What surprises me most," said Travers, "is that it seems to be quite a highway! One would not expect to find many travellers on such a road; but we have passed them by scores, and here comes another party."

It was only by the sound of horses' hoofs clattering on the stone-paved way that he made the announcement. But the next moment the party came in view around the great projecting shoulder of a cliff—three men and a woman on horseback, the former booted and spurred, with short riding-jackets and great, broad *sombreros*, the latter wrapped to the eyes, like an Oriental woman, in her blue *rebozo*. Their courteous "*Buenos d ás*" had hardly died away, as another cliff hid them from sight, when Dorothea observed:

"They look picturesque enough to belong to the band of some Mexican Fra Diavolo; and, now that one thinks of it, this would be a perfect place for the operations of such a gentleman."

"It has not been very long since not only this road but every other road in the country was the scene of the operations of countless such gentlemen," said Russell. "Too much credit cannot be given to the stern measures by which the present government has put down brigandage so completely that peaceful travellers like those we have passed, and pleasure-seeking excursionists like ourselves, can journey along such a wild and once dangerous way as this with perfect safety."

“I observed, however," said Travers, "that all three of the peaceful travellers had revolvers belted around their waists."

"A habit which is a relic of past danger rather than a proof of any in the present," said Russell. "Mexicans are slow to change a custom, even when the reason for it has ceased to exist."

"But how does it come to pass that this road is such a highway?" continued Travers. "I should never have suspected that there was very brisk traffic from the realm of Pluto, and we seem to be journeying in that direction alone."

"This," said Philip, "is the only road which leads to a very important ferry on the Rio Grande de Santiago, and thence to an important country beyond rich in mines and timber. All the charcoal consumed in Guadalajara comes by this route. Here are some *carboneros* now."

A troop of small donkeys, laden with great sacks of charcoal that filled the narrow road from cliff to parapet, appeared as he spoke, followed by two men, black and grimy enough of face and hands to have come from the region to which Travers alluded. The foot-passengers were obliged to take refuge in the angles of the rocks to escape being roughly rubbed by the projecting sacks, and, when the troop had passed, resumed their own way downwards into the strange world which became with every step more wild of aspect and luxuriant in verdure.

Down and still down they went, seeing now, over the outer edge of their road, the fan-like tops of a forest of banana-trees below, which marked the bottom of the barranca. Presently a turn, and they found themselves unexpectedly on level ground, where their burros and attendants awaited them, and where a vista of enchantment, a very paradise, as Russell had foretold, of tropical beauty stretched before them. Here, along the banks of the stream, on terraces formed ages since by the sedimentary deposits washed from the mountain-sides, grow the forests of banana, orange, and other trees which they had perceived from above, and which find here a climate and soil so perfectly suited to them that the fruit of the barranca is always at a premium in the market of Guadalajara. The road was now a green archway lined by the most profuse vegetation and richest tints of colour. They mounted, and a few minutes later were riding past a

cluster of houses that, covered with a thatch of banana leaves and bark, rested immediately against the towering masses of rock which line the pass. Before these dwellings there was barely room for the road to wind along the bank of the stream that dashed by over its rocks to join the great river now close at hand. Dark faces looked wonderingly at the Gringos passing by—for the inhabitants of the barranca are not accustomed to such visitants—while the Gringos themselves were hardly less astonished by this unexpected end of a journey which had seemed to be leading them farther and farther into the most remote recesses of Nature.

"Is it possible that people live down here?" said Dorothea in a tone of amazement. "What occupation have they?"

"Why, to cultivate and gather the fruit, which is a specialty of the barranca," replied her brother. "A very fine coffee is also produced here."

"And do they own this land?" asked the general.

"They!" Philip laughed. "There is hardly a foot of land in Mexico owned by any but a rich man. That is one of the curses of the country. There being no tax on land, the *haciendados* can hold, without expense, leagues upon leagues of territory. This ground forms a very valuable estate, and belongs to a man in Guadalajara. The village is composed of his labourers."

"I should not mind taking service with him," observed Travers. "It looks as if one might lead quite an ideal life down here, far removed from the fret and turmoil of the world, amid these romantic scenes, with nothing more exacting in the way of labour than the Arcadian occupation of tending and gathering fruit."

"I fancy that your occupation would prove more Arcadian in appearance than in reality," said Russell. "But here we are at the river—and what a scene!"

It was a scene of the most surpassing grandeur which a sudden turn of the way opened to their gaze. Directly across the end of the barranca flowed the swift and turbulent current of the Rio Grande de Santiago, here well deserving its high-sounding name, as, cutting its resistless way through the mountains which overshadow it, it thunders down towards the Pacific Ocean. The broad current had, with all its turbulence, a majestic sweep as it rolled by, filling the gorge with the mighty music of its waters, while the great mountain-sides and towering cliffs which rose abruptly from its banks, formed a picture of wildest loveliness.

There was a pause of absolute silence, and then Margaret Langdon drew a deep breath.

"I have wondered," she said, "as we descended deeper and deeper, amid surroundings which grew constantly more grand, what we could possibly find at the end that would not be an anticlimax for such a passage. I never dreamed that Nature had in store for us a climax like this!"

"Nature seldom fails in her effects," said Travers. "She is a most consummate artist, and has certainly surpassed herself in the present instance. Anything less than this superb flood and this magnificent gorge would have fallen flat after the barranca. But as it is, no fitter introduction ever led to a great conclusion."

"It strikes me," said Dorothea, "that your tone towards Nature is a trifle too patronising, Mr. Travers. We are aware that it is a common fault of yours, but it requires, I think, a good deal of— shall I say assurance?—to patronise the Barranca de Portillo and the Rio Grande de Santiago."

"May I ask," inquired Mr. Travers, "what form appreciation should take, in your opinion?"

"Awe, admiration too deep for words, a proper reverential attitude of mind," she replied promptly. "In the face of such a scene as this, language becomes an impertinence."

"Then we must be impertinent," said Philip, "since I, for one, don't hold with speechless admiration. In my opinion there are words to express every emotion if we only know how to find and use them. But if the river and its scenery are a surprise to you, I am sure you did not expect to see anything like this."

"This" was a dwelling the character of which proved, indeed, very surprising in such a spot. Turning from where the ferry-boat of which Philip had earlier spoken swung back and forth across the rushing river, they passed along the bank for several hundred yards until coming unexpectedly to a gateway in a stone wall that bounded the road on the inner side, they saw before them a long, picturesque building with arcaded corridor extending across its entire front, a veritable *casa grande*, embowered in this wild nook of Nature, for the great heights which here receded a little from the brink of the stream rose boldly and precipitately in massive cliffs immediately in its rear.

"The residence of the *haciendado*, when he descends to view his possessions," said Philip, riding into the paved court before the house as if it were his own. "We will rest and take our lunch here."

"All I can say," observed Dorothea, looking around, "is that, if we have reached the realm of Pluto, it is a charming place—one of the most charming I have ever seen!"

"Certainly no Proserpine need object to being brought here," added Russell with a smile.

"She certainly would not object to reaching here if she had walked six miles down that dreadful barranca," said Miss Graham feelingly.

"'Dreadful ' is good as a new descriptive term," remarked Travers. "We have been ringing the changes on 'wild,' 'grand,' 'magnificent,' and 'stupendous,' but no one before has thought of ' dreadful.' And yet there is much in the barranca to inspire a sentiment of dread—especially when one thinks of walking up its six miles!"

This last malicious touch roused the general. "By Jove, yes!" he said. "If those infernal donkeys were not able to bring us down, how can they possibly carry us up? And although walking down was bad enough, it will be child's play compared to climbing those steep acclivities—with my lame leg, too!"

"Don't anticipate evil, papa," said Mrs. Langdon. "Let us enjoy this beautiful spot without thinking of how we shall get back. No doubt the donkeys will carry us up better than they were able to bring us down. And, after all, it was not their fault that we could not stay on their backs."

"No, it was the fault of Phil—the greatest donkey of them all!" rejoined the general. "You are an optimist and an apologist of the worst kind, Margaret. From your point of view nothing is ever going to happen until it has happened, and nobody is ever to blame."

"That is surely better than crossing bridges and climbing heights before one comes to them," said Russell. "Mrs. Langdon is a very wise philosopher, so let us follow her advice and forget the burros and the upward climb and simply enjoy our rest in this ideal place."

They were sitting while they talked on a bench placed under the broad shade of the arcaded corridor which stretched along the front of the house, ending at one extremity in what was apparently a chapel, and at the other opening on a *huerta* or garden filled with fruit-trees.

Framed by the arches, an enchanting picture was before their eyes—the majestic current of the river as it swept by, the bold, forest-clad heights that rose abruptly from its opposite bank, and a group of noble trees which shaded the front of the house.

Presently Philip, who had disappeared within, reappeared through the great, open doorway, accompanied by an elderly woman, who proved to be the housekeeper, and who, assuring them that the house was theirs, begged that they would enter, in order to take their luncheon more comfortably than in the corridor.

"More comfortably," repeated Dorothea; "that is possible. But taking luncheon in a room is very commonplace, while this—"

"All comfort is commonplace," interposed her father, "but not to be despised by sensible people on that account. Of course we will go in. I have always objected to making a table of my knees, and eating with my fingers, when it could be avoided."

"But such methods, you must confess, are very suitable to the Garden of Eden, or the realm of Hades, or whatever primitive and remote region we may suppose ourselves to have reached," observed Travers.

The general, however, had already marched into the house, and they all followed. A broad passage led to an inner court, surrounded by a brick-paved corridor—on which opened the household apartments — and thickly shaded by coffee-trees. Nothing could be more charming than the effect of these trees. Light and graceful in form, the sunlight sifting down through their small, glossy leaves touched into brilliant colour the clusters of their red berries, and covered the court with a delicate network of light and shadow. Every one paused to admire.

"And these are genuine coffee-trees!" said Margaret. "I cannot express the respect with which I regard them, in view of the refreshment and delight which their fruit has always afforded me."

"Arabia itself does not produce better coffee than Mexico," said Russell. Then turning to the housekeeper who stood by, he began in fluent Spanish to discuss the qualities of the different coffees of the country, until finding that he was not distinctly conversant with the merits of the coffee of the barranca, she insisted, with true Mexican courtesy and hospitality, upon having some prepared for him and for his friends.

Russell's air of gratification betrayed him when he entered the apartment where the others were already assembled around a table, while a slender young *mozo* (a servant of the house) brought plates, knives and forks, and placed before them, then assisted Mrs. Langdon in distributing the contents of their lunch-baskets.

"Russell has achieved something which he feels to be clever," said Travers, glancing up. "One can tell it by his self-satisfied expression. There is no good in trying to look modest now, señor de mi consideration. What have you accomplished?"

"One would not go to Olympus without expecting to be served with the nectar that flows for the illustrious personages residing there," replied Russell, subsiding into the chair which the mozo rushed to present to him. "Should one, then, descend to Hades and not taste the characteristic beverage of the spot? I wonder, by-the-bye, what was the beverage of Hades? At all events, we shall soon have some coffee grown and gathered in the garden of Proserpine."

"Really? How delicious!" cried Dorothea. “It is the crowning touch to make our excursion perfect, to drink in this unique spot the coffee grown here. Phil, why did you not think of it?"

Phil, who was drawing the cork of a wine-bottle, shrugged his shoulders. "Consider it an accepted fact that I am not such an accomplished guide as Mr. Russell," he replied. "I perceive that I am not fitted by nature or by art to lead a party of tourists—yes, Dorothea, I repeat, tourists—into the wild haunts of Nature. I am better suited for a party of engineers, who are used to taking what comes and don't expect Arabian steeds or other luxuries. Not but that I could easily have arranged for the coffee if I had fancied you wanted it. For myself I prefer wine."

"I don't see that, because you overlook these little things in which perfection consists, you need become insulting," said Dorothea, whom the epithet of tourist had incensed.

“Peace! peace!" cried Mrs. Langdon. "Luncheon is served, and quarrelling is absolutely forbidden."

The room in which they thus took their luncheon, with much gay talk and laughter, was, with the exception of the tables and chairs, bare of furniture. But it was airy and pleasant, and had the charm that seemed to pervade the whole of this delightful spot. The walls, as usual in Mexican houses, were decorated in distemper colours, and the ceiling was of great height: the heavy wooden shutters which closed the windows had been thrown open, showing through the arches of the corridor beyond beautiful glimpses of the magnificent river scenery, while the door opened on the verdure-filled inner court, where all seemed sunny peace and stillness. A fresh breeze came in through the unbarred windows, together with the ceaseless music of the stream. It was truly an ideal resting-place, a bit of enchantment, as Dorothea did not grow weary of declaring at the end of their wild and wonderful journey. When the coffee appeared it proved fragrant and delicious enough to have been served in Olympus rather than in what they all now agreed to call Hades. Under its influence the general, who much loved the potent berry, softened in his mood even towards the burros, while Miss Graham remarked that the *casa grande* was certainly a very sweet place, and would be a most romantic spot to visit—if it were only easier of access.

"Come and see what Russell calls the garden of Proserpine," said Philip when they finally rose from the table. “I presume he means the *huerta*, but if so, Proserpine had no flowers in her garden in the lower world."

"Do you think she would have had them if she could?" asked Mrs. Langdon. "I think there was nothing she would have cared for less. The mere sight of flowers would have recalled those fair meadows of the earth where she had once wandered so blithely, and where she met her doom. No, I am sure that her garden in Hades would contain only dark, sorrowful trees, arching over long alleys full of shadow."

"The *huerta* somewhat answers to that description," said Philip. "At least there seems to be plenty of shadow, although the trees are not dark and sorrowful. But we'll go and explore, shall we not?" turning to Miss Graham.

"Oh, by all means," answered that young lady, "and perhaps—who knows?—we may meet Proserpine herself."

"Great would be her surprise, then, to find that a flower of earth—the fairest of Violets—had come down to brighten her gloomy shades," responded Philip with gallant promptness.

"For my part," said the general, "I think it is a shame to compare this charming place to the infernal regions—for that is what all your talk about Hades amounts to."

"Not at all," said Russell. "The Hades of the ancients was very far from bearing any resemblance to the idea which is expressed for us by the infernal regions. A mournful and shadowy realm, the place of shades, it certainly was, but no more than that. Even so, however, we must confess that a comparison between it and this beautiful spot is rather forced, and was only suggested by our apparent descent into the depths of the earth."

“So merely apparent," said Travers, "that we are still some four or five thousand feet above our level when we are at home."

"How very disagreeable it is to have scientific truths forced upon one!" cried Dorothea impatiently. "We are in the depths of the earth! Whoever doubts it should be condemned to climb to the summit of the barranca, without aid of burro, and he would speedily be convinced of the fact."

"We shall all be condemned to that, I am very sure," replied Travers. "But meanwhile, suppose we go and see Charon at work? It would not do to overlook such an obvious comparison as that for the ferryman and his boat."

"Certainly not," Dorothea agreed. So, leaving the general placidly smoking on the corridor, and Mrs. Langdon and Russell in the act of following Philip and Violet into the garden, they took their way across the open space in front of the house, and seating themselves on the gnarled roots of a great, spreading tree upon the river bank, regarded with much interest the animated scene which the ferry constantly presented.

Very little like the dark and sullen tide of the Styx, however, was this bold stream, rushing with resistless force down its wild gorge; and still less like the pale shades whom Charon ferried were the picturesque passengers of the boat they watched. But if their surprise had been excited on their downward way by the number of travellers whom they passed, they were more surprised now by the constant traffic across the river, proving that an important section of country found its only approach to Guadalajara by this route. They saw long trains of pack-mules forced to swim the stream, while imps of boys swam with them and belaboured them vigorously whenever they showed any signs of failing. "How I wish they would get severely kicked!" said Dorothea vindictively, as she watched this operation. Men and women, meanwhile, filled the boat, as it swung slowly back and forth across the stream, the bright colours of their costumes showing in relief against the dark mountain-sides and the green, swirling current. Now and again a horseman, with all his bright trappings glistening in the sunshine, himself a figure that seemed to have no place in anything save some romance of the conquistadores, rode into the boat and fascinated their gaze as long as he was in sight.

"Look at that fellow!" said Travers on such an occasion. “He is not only a delight to the eye in his picturesqueness, but that costume of embroidered buckskin is absolutely perfect in its adaptation to the use for which it is intended. For horsemanship nothing could be better, and I do not wonder that foreigners living in the country adopt the national dress for all outdoor purposes, especially for riding."

"It certainly makes the dress which all of you wear look very hideous," observed Dorothea, regarding him meditatively.

"An effect of contrast is hardly necessary to accomplish that," he replied. "Did you observe, by-the-bye, the peculiarly graceful appearance which we all presented—we men, I mean—on the burros and pack saddles? It was so overwhelmingly ludicrous that I really think Phil must have planned the thing as a practical joke."

"I don't know," said Dorothea. "I am only sure that if I had been as well acquainted with the barranca when we were at Atemajac as I am now, I should have voted to return to Guadalajara in preference to mounting those burros. For I confess to you that my heart sinks at the prospect of our return. How are we to get to the top of the barranca? It was easy enough coming down, as papa says, a veritable *facilis descensus Averni*[1]—although my feet are very sore from the stones—but how will it be going back? A steady, unrelieved climb of six miles!"

"Perhaps," said Travers with what he felt to be an insincere attempt at encouragement, "the burros may prove able to carry us back."

"You know that is impossible!" she replied indignantly. "Those ridiculous little creatures are physically incapable of it, even if one could sit on the abominable pack-saddles. But remember the steepness of that road! Will it be much of an improvement, do you think, to slip off backwards rather than forwards? That will be the only difference between ascent and descent."

Aqueduct near Guadalajara

[1] Literally "The descent to Avernus is easy." From Virgil's Aeneid, with reference to Avernus, a metonym for the underworld and to Lake Avernus in Italy, a volcanic crater lake reputed to emit deadly vapors.

Travers looked mournfully at the burros grouped about the gateway, as he felt the truth of her words. "Phil ought to be thrashed!" he said with emphasis. "One comfort is that he will have to carry Miss Graham if no burro proves able to do so. She will never walk up those six miles."

"Do you call that a comfort?" demanded Dorothea. "I call it anything else. It is just the opportunity she wants for helplessness, and flirtation and oh, what a fool one can be sometimes!" she broke off abruptly with a sigh that seemed drawn from the depths of her being.

"Pardon me," said Travers, "but in my opinion Miss Graham might be characterised in that manner at all times."

"I did not intend to apply my words to her—although she is a fool in some respects, and not at all a fool in others," Dorothea answered. “I was thinking of myself. I was reflecting on the folly which made me insist on bringing her with us, to spoil the pleasure of our journey."

"I don't think she has done that," he said consolingly. “But I knew from the first that she would not be an agreeable element. A woman so devoid of everything except good looks and personal vanity must become very tiresome in any prolonged association. What surprises me is that you were not aware of this."

"I was aware of it," Dorothea replied. “But—well, I have a mind to tell you why I insisted on bringing her with us. Neither Margaret nor papa cared to do so. The fault was all mine. Really," in a tone of deepest despondency, “I sometimes think that I am an absolute idiot!”

“You have never impressed me in that manner," said Mr. Travers, politely restraining a laugh, "but the study of character is my special hobby, and any new light on yours will be gratefully received."

"My character is not in question," said she, rather inconsistently. “Do not try to irritate me by talking in that way—you know you can succeed very easily. And I really want to tell you why I was so foolish as to insist upon asking Violet to come with us. Of course, you thought it strange—for no one could conceive that she would be a pleasant addition to such a party—but I had a reason. We had taken fright, papa and Margaret and I, about Phil's enthusiasm over some Mexican girl, and, with all our prejudices in arms, we were afraid he might marry her. That danger seemed to us then a thing to be averted at any cost. So we decided to come and look after him; and it was my suggestion to bring Violet along as a counter-attraction—for Phil was at one time quite infatuated with her, you know."

Travers signified that he remembered. “But I am astonished," he said, “that you should have thought any woman, Mexican or otherwise, less desirable than Miss Graham."

"Have I not admitted that I was a fool?" asked Dorothea with asperity. “Now I know that there is not probably one of these girls here who is not worth ten of her. But until Mr. Russell opened our minds we were as ignorant and prejudiced as most Americans are about Mexico and Mexicans. Phil fell in love with the country at once; but we had no respect for his opinion, and so—and so—you see how this act of folly has come about."

"I see," said Travers, "that you were not as absolutely without reason in your conduct as I imagined?"

"It was very kind of you to imagine that I was likely to act in a manner absolutely without reason. But I do not want to quarrel with you at this moment, because I have a favour to ask of you."

"Your frankness is always to be depended upon. Let me assure you with equal sincerity that I shall be happy to do anything that I can for you."

"What you can do for me then," she said with a sudden change of manner, the more charming because there was in it no intention to charm, "is to exert your influence to make Phil see this girl as we see her. He has great respect for your opinion, he thinks you very clever, he likes you very much."

Mr. Travers lifted his shoulders slightly in his French fashion. "A man may regard another man as a second Solomon, and yet not accept his opinion about a woman," he said. "So, don't rely upon my influence—although I shall not neglect to put in now and then a word in season. I think, however, that you may rely on Phil's common sense. Why should you suppose that he is not able to perceive what is so plain to us, that she has neither mind nor heart worthy of the name?"

"She has a beautiful face," said Dorothea, "and that is all a man thinks of in connection with a woman."

"Is it? I may claim to be a man, and I assure you that I have never known the day when a beautiful face had any attraction to me if there was no intelligence behind it."

"Oh, but you are not quite like ordinary men," said she. "You have more sense—I always acknowledged that—and you like cleverness in women. Most men do not. I am afraid Phil is more like the majority of his sex than like you. But you will try to make him see how absolutely *bête* she is?"

"I will endeavour to do so. With her own unconscious assistance the effort should not be difficult."

"It seems very shabby to plot against any one in this manner, and say unkind things of her behind her back." Observed Miss Meynell, with an air of contrition. “But what can I do? I have put myself in the position—and it is humiliating enough to have to ask you to help me out of it."

If Mr. Travers thought this a little ungrateful after the handsome manner in which he had agreed to render assistance, he did not say so. He only smiled.

"It is somewhat like poetical justice," he agreed, "for you know you have made me feel the weight of your displeasure very frequently on the subject of the fair Violet; and, had the matter rested with you, I fear I should this moment be on the banks of the Mississippi rather than on those of the Rio Grande de Santiago. But I don't bear malice, and I like Phil too well to let him fall a prey to such a siren if any words of wisdom from my lips can prevent the catastrophe. But I notice that there is a cessation in Charon's work just now—nobody to be ferried across at present—so what do you think of inducing him to take us out on the river, since his appears to be the only available craft?"

"I think very well of it," she replied, springing lightly to her feet. “Let us call the party together at once."

"I don't see why we should do everything *en masse*," Travers observed in rather a grumbling tone, as he too rose. "One grows tired of being always one of a party, and longs for a little independent action now and then."

"I am sure there is not the least objection to your being as independent as you please," Dorothea returned; "but I should consider myself very selfish if I went out in the boat without a word to the others, who would certainly like to go also."

Thus rebuked, Mr. Travers without further remonstrance proceeded to the gateway before the house and addressed the general, still placidly smoking in the corridor.

"We are going out in the boat, and thought you might like to come," he shouted. "Where are the others?"

"Thanks, I'm very comfortable where I am," replied the general. "The others are still there." He nodded towards the *huerta*.

"They must find the garden of Proserpine very fascinating," said Travers, turning to Dorothea. "Does it not seem rather a pity to disturb them?"

"No," replied that young lady ruthlessly, "for Violet is flirting, I am sure, and we cannot too soon interrupt that amusement. We will go after them."

The garden of Proserpine proved to be much such a place as Mrs. Langdon had described, except that the trees which filled it were not dark or sombre. They were all either coffee or fruit-bearing trees, but planted so thickly and growing so luxuriantly in the moist, sheltered spot that underneath their boughs reigned a shade scarcely pierced by any wandering gleams of sunshine even when the sun was in meridian. At this hour there were certainly no such gleams, for the shadow of the great mountain behind the house had fallen over the garden; and as Dorothea and Travers paced the narrow paths, under bending boughs of dense and glossy foliage, they felt as if they might indeed have wandered into an enchanted spot, so dim, green, and full of shadowy mystery did it appear.

"Margaret was right, there are no flowers here," said Dorothea, smiling at her own fancifulness.

"I feel grossly practical in remarking that no flowers could bloom in such deep shade," said Travers. "But if this were truly the garden of Proserpine, we should hardly, I think, find any flowers of earth in it. The 'dark queen' would care for nothing that could recall to her the sun-bright upper world."

"One may be sure of that," said Dorothea with conviction. "'A sorrow's crown of sorrow' is not only in 'remembering happier things,' but whatever recalls those happier things must become in itself hateful. But see!"—she paused with an unconsciously dramatic gesture—"did I not tell you how it would be?"

The picture which she indicated certainly seemed to need no interpretation. By the rock-wall which enclosed the garden, and was of height sufficient to afford a comfortable resting-place for the elbows, stood Miss Graham, trifling with some sprays of the coffee-tree while she talked to Philip, who on his part, leaning with his back against the same wall and his hands in his pockets, surveyed at his leisure, with a decided air of *bien-être*, her pretty countenance.

"They appear very well entertained," remarked Travers in what Dorothea felt to be his most exasperating manner. "I am still of the opinion that it is a pity to disturb them."

"And this is the help you promised in opening Phil's eyes!" she cried turning to him. "You would coolly walk away and leave him in—"

"The toils of the enchantress," he supplemented as she paused. "Yes, I think I should, for in such cases heroic measures do no good. He will only think one a nuisance for interrupting him now."

"Then he may think me a nuisance at once," replied Dorothea, as stepping forward she addressed the philandering pair in a tone of uncompromising severity.

"Are you not aware that we must soon start homeward, and that we have not yet half seen this beautiful place?" she demanded. “If we are to see it, we should be exploring, and not fl — idling in a corner."

“Has any one interfered with your seeing everything?" inquired Philip, raising his eyebrows without stirring from his easy position. “If Miss Graham and I prefer to idle here, that is our own affair. We offer no obstacle to the most energetic exploring on the part of anybody else.

"And I really do not perceive much difference between idling in a corner of the garden and idling under a tree on the river bank," observed Miss Graham in her dulcet voice, but with a glance which was not altogether amiable. “Dorothea’s energy has been very lately developed. Perhaps Mr. Travers failed to prove entertaining."

"There is nothing more possible than that," said the gentleman thus alluded to. "But our present errand is to inquire if you would not like to go out on the river? And here come Mrs. Langdon and Russell, whom we are also in search of."

"Go out on the river!" repeated Russell. “What do you say, Mrs. Langdon? It may repay us to do so. The view from the centre of the stream must be fine."

It proved to be more than fine. Floating on the hurrying green water they looked upon a picture composed of bold, forest-clad heights and stupendous cliffs, of the opening of the barranca with its foaming torrent, broad-leaved tropical verdure, and palm-thatched huts, and of the graceful arches of the *casa grande*. embowered in luxuriant green and relieved against the majestic mountain which overshadowed it.

"I have never seen a house so picturesque in situation as that, or so delightful in its suggestions of seclusion and repose," remarked Travers, as, having pulled up the stream, they now floated slowly down past this fairy-like spot. "And the owner lives in Guadalajara!"

"There is nothing more certain than that, if you were the owner, you would live there too," said Philip. "The seclusion and repose are all very well to admire for a day, but if it came to staying here for any length of time the picturesqueness might wear another aspect."

"You were always a Philistine of Philistines, Phil," returned Travers calmly. "How should you understand the exquisite charm which life in such a spot might possess for a different person?”

"Observe that modesty restrains him from characterising himself," observed Philip, with a laugh. "'A different person' would be quite welcome to all the charm he could find here, for me. I only wish we were safely out of it now; and if ever I undertake to lead another party into a barranca—"

"Try to find something better than burros to mount them," interposed his sister severely. "See! there is papa beckoning us from the bank."

"The general is mindful of the ascent before us," said Russell; "and when one considers the burros, one cannot blame him."

"Never before have I desired so much to be an angel," said Miss Graham, with a sigh. "If one had but a pair of wings—"

"Failing them, however," said Dorothea, who divined the obvious compliment trembling on Philip's lips, "we must mount the burros, or, more likely, trudge on foot up the heights that await us, since there is no other possible means of gaining the crust of the earth again. But if the distance were twelve miles instead of six," added the speaker with emphasis, "I should still think that climbing every foot of it was a small price to pay for the pleasure of having seen this wild and wonderfully beautiful spot."

And it was creditable to the party that, with one or two exceptions, they were willing to echo this sentiment, even when, weary and footsore (for the burros proved even more useless in ascent than in descent), they stood once more between the great rocks that form the mouth of the stupendous chasm, and saw the wide plain spreading before them bathed in sunset light, towards the distant towers of Guadalajara.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XII.

ON LAKE CHAPALA.

"I HAVE a letter here from my friend Don Rafael," said Philip, coming in from the post-office the evening after the excursion to the barranca, with his hands full of letters and papers. "He says that instead of sending carriages to meet us at the railway station nearest to his hacienda, which involves a long and dusty drive, he would suggest that we take the boat on Lake Chapala, and let him meet us at a point very much nearer his house. What do you all say? The lake is well worth seeing for itself."

"If we go to the hacienda at all, we must follow Don Rafael's suggestion about the manner of reaching it," said the general. "But how and where do we get to the lake?"

"The best way to do so," answered his son, "is to go by rail to a place near here called Atequiza. There we can get horses and ride a distance of four leagues to Chapala—a town on the lake—where we will take the boat."

"Four leagues—twelve miles," said Mrs. Langdon. "That is a short distance."

"It will depend on how you are mounted whether it will seem to you long or short," observed Russell. "But one thing is absolutely certain—after you reach the lake you will be repaid for any fatigue you have undergone. When will the boat be at Chapala?" he asked, turning to Phil.

"To-morrow evening," that young man answered. "Therefore it will be well if we leave here to-morrow morning. All in favour of the motion will please say Aye!—the ayes have it. I will go at once and telegraph to Don Rafael that we shall be with him Thursday night. And you will get up early to-morrow morning, in order to take the train at nine o'clock. Remember that I am in charge of this party now—*vice* Mr. Russell, superseded."

There was no failure or delay the next morning. The party assembled punctually for an early breakfast, and were at the railway station some time before the train was prepared to depart. The morning was as usual bright and exhilarating to the senses, and while Dorothea and Travers strolled up and down the wide platform they commented on its brilliance and then laughed at themselves for doing so.

"I wonder what takes the place of weather—that inexhaustible subject with us!—as a topic of conversation in this country?" Travers observed. "I have not yet discovered what it is; and there seems a great hiatus in conversation where the weather ought to be. From force of habit I remarked to a Mexican acquaintance yesterday that it was a fine day. He looked in surprise first at me and then around at the day, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and asked, 'Why not?' The question found me unprepared with an answer. There was, indeed, no reason why that particular day should not be fine in a climate where every day is fine. But such brilliant sameness of weather sometimes cuts the ground conversationally from under one's feet."

"Come, you loiterers!" cried Philip—"unless you prefer to walk to Atequiza. Mexican trains give scant warning before they start."

"I had forgotten that we were going to start at all," said Travers, hastening to place his companion on the train.

A few minutes later it moved off, with the accustomed indifference to any heedless mortal who might be waiting some signal of departure, and sped out over the shining plain. It is a short run to Atequiza,* where the white arches and clustered buildings of the hacienda from which the station derives its name are in sight, a mile or two distant across the green expanse of spreading fields. A tramway from the hacienda to the station is equipped with a car so small and prettily finished that it looked like a toy to charm a child, as it stood with its sleek mule beside the station.

"Hacienda de Atequiza," said the general, reading the name inscribed upon it. "I suppose this is a private affair."

"Belongs to the hacienda," said his son; “but since we are going there to obtain horses, we shall take advantage of it."

He walked up to the driver, exchanged a few words with him, and returned saying: "It is all right. The car, he assures me, is ours; so we will take possession at once."

They entered, the mule was transferred in leisurely fashion to the other end of the car, the train moved away, and they also moved off across the level fields towards the hacienda. There they were informed that the horses and guide desired could be obtained; but the horses were unfortunately in the fields, and getting them was a work of time. Of interminable time it seemed to the group who, after they had seen everything surrounding the great, dusty courtyard in which they found themselves—the large mill that looked like a fortress across the plain, the granaries, store-rooms, work-shops—were forced to spend at least two hours seated under the arcaded corridor of the *casa grande*, in the midst of piled sacks of grain, watching with an interest that finally began to flag the strange world of activity around them.

At length Miss Graham, yawning in a manner expressive of infinite weariness, delivered herself of a consideration that had already presented itself to the minds of the others. "If this is a

* Travellers can now see Lake Chapala by taking the boat at Ocotlan, a town close to the railroad.

specimen of a hacienda," she observed, "and the one to which we are going is not more entertaining, I really think the best thing we can do is to return to Guadalajara."

"Not without seeing the lake," said Dorothea, quickly. "I, too, begin to have doubts about the hacienda—"

"You need not have," said Philip, coming up at the moment. "There are haciendas and haciendas. If you fancy that we are going to one like this, you will find yourself greatly mistaken. The difference is that the owner and his family do not live here, while Don Rafael generally resides on one or the other of his haciendas. But here come the horses at last—rather a sorry lot, I regret to say. But we must take what we can get, and be thankful. Now prepare for a warm and dusty ride as we cross the hills."

The horses were indeed a "sorry lot" the halt, the lame, and the blind being represented. "We cannot flatter ourselves that our cavalcade, as a whole, presents a very imposing appearance," remarked Travers, when they were all finally mounted, "but there is at least no reason for one to suppose that he presents any better appearance than another, and that is generally a solid comfort to human nature."

"So far from finding comfort, solid or otherwise, in it," said Dorothea, "I should not so much mind the blindness of my horse, if I were not also afflicted by seeing the lameness of yours. But let us start, for, mounted as we are, I begin to think that twelve miles may prove, after all, a considerable distance."

Before they had accomplished a fourth of it the whole party were distinctly of the opinion that it was a very considerable distance indeed. Even had they been well mounted, it would have been impossible to ride fast under the vertical rays of the sun which poured directly upon their unshaded way, a winding trail crossing a high, barren ridge, covered chiefly with stones and cacti. Their guide, a lean, brown old Indian, marched ahead, stick in hand, and two small boys followed, prodding now and then the lagging animals. They rode mostly in single file, and there was little said by any one until, on gaming the summit of the ridge, there was a simultaneous exclamation from several voices at sight of the lake spreading in blue, shining beauty afar.

"It looks very near," said the general. "We can't be more than an hour's ride from it."

"Much more, I am sorry to say," replied his son. "We shall do well if we reach it in three hours. Do you see a white speck yonder by the lakeside? It is the church-tower of the town of Chapala. There we are bound."

"This view of the wide, green, beautiful valley beneath us is almost refreshment enough, after the desolate hillsides we have been looking at for an hour past," remarked Margaret.

"I fancy we shall want more substantial refreshment than that before we reach the lake, if it is still three hours distant," said Dorothea. "Mr. Russell, will you please tell this small imp near me not to strike my horse again without my permission, or I shall certainly strike *him*? I will not have the infirmities of age abused in such a manner. This poor beast is doing all that he possibly can do."

Russell conveyed the desired warning to the too zealous attendant, who, after stating in reply that the horse was well able to go faster but was afflicted with an incredible laziness, fell back and proceeded to devote his attentions unrebuked to the steed of Miss Graham.

Onward proceeded the cavalcade, gradually descending lower, and finally leaving the trail on the stony hillsides for dusty, well-travelled roads, where the usual trains of laden burros

come and go. The green fields of the wide valley, which looked so beautiful from above, now spread around them, they passed picturesque villages, thatched huts, under spreading tropical shade where dusky faces looked curiously at them, and finally called a halt near a clear, rushing stream for rest and refreshment.

How lovely is water in a sun-parched land! This bright rivulet, its banks clad with green rushes and the roots of spreading shade-trees, was more delightful to the eye and ear than words can express. To the palate it was less agreeable; but claret cooled therein proved refreshing to parched throats, and made it possible to do justice to the contents of the lunch-basket. An hour or two of mid-day heat was loitered away here, and then the word was again "To horse!" When Dorothea regained her saddle, she looked wistfully across the valley towards the church tower of Chapala, still a very distant point. "I think it must be a mirage," she said. "We don't seem to approach any nearer to it."

“Oh, yes, we do!" replied Travers. "I can now perceive that it is a tower. When we saw it first it might have been anything else. But we have still a considerable distance to journey before we reach it. Let no man tell me that it is not farther—much farther—than four leagues from Atequiza to that tower."

"I shall not be the man," said Philip, "for I think myself that it is farther. Leagues in this country are very elastic. But one thing is certain, we shall not reach there unless we start—so, forward! Miss Graham, may I put up your parasol for you?"

"You certainly may," replied that young lady from behind a double thickness of tissue veil, "for this sun is enough to turn one into a Mexican as far as colour is concerned."

"Into nothing half so good-looking," said Dorothea, glancing disparagingly at the members of the party. "We burn red and ugly, while a Mexican only takes a richer bronze from the sun."

"That is because we are not children of the sun," said Russell. "Therefore he treats us less tenderly."

Two hours longer riding through a valley constantly growing more luxuriantly green, more suggestive of unlimited richness in its varied products, over level, dusty roads, past wayside shrines and villages, brought them very near the flashing line of water, until suddenly, from a slight eminence, they saw the town of Chapala lying below them—a charming picture on its green promontory stretching out into the blue lake, its beautiful church tower forming a perfect point in the landscape.

"It looks an absolutely ideal spot!" said Margaret. "One might fancy that it was Arcadia, shut in by encircling mountains from the world."

"It is not, of course, as ideal as it looks," said Russell, "but nevertheless I found it once, for two or three weeks, a very Arcadian spot. A perfect climate, absolute quiet—"

"Yes," said Travers, "I fancy the quiet might be absolute enough to satisfy any one in search of that article. What else did you find?"

"There are times when a man wants little else," the other replied. "But in point of fact there are boating, fishing, bathing, glorious scenery, and unlimited opportunities for work—everything, in short, except modern luxuries and society. And both of those things I have accustomed my self to dispense with for long periods."

“Until you have grown to enjoy dispensing with them," said Travers. "*Eh bien*! " with a slight sigh, “I can understand it. The passion for solitude grows upon one, and someday I too shall break away from the complexities of modern existence and take a deep draught of simple, primitive life."

"It looks as if the draught here might be as deep as one pleased," said Mrs Langdon.
So they rode slowly along through the golden light of afternoon, until finally they found themselves in the streets of Chapala. The little town did not altogether disappoint the expectations raised by its appearance from afar. Its streets, lined by the usual flat roofed adobe dwellings, were moderately clean, and along them ran merrily a stream of bright water to which Russell called the attention of the general. "If you were to put your hand into that you would find it as warm as the water of Aguas Calientes," he said.

' It flows from the hot springs which gush forth at the foot of the mountain. Very hot springs they are, and of great medicinal value. It is only a question of time when this place becomes a great health and pleasure resort."

"The wonder is that it should not be so already," said the general, looking around with deepening surprise and admiration.

Certainly a more beautiful spot could not be conceived. Beside the little town lying on its wave-washed promontory rose a bold and splendid height, the mountain from which gushed forth the hot springs of which Russell spoke, while before them spread the romantic beauty of the lake, a noble expanse of water, with abrupt, mountain-clad shores, save where the rich valley across which they had journeyed opened inland. The town narrowed with the promontory to a point, and at this point, within a few yards of the water, stood the church with the tall, slender tower that had shone before their eyes all day. Opposite was the hostelry to which they were bound, and where they now dismounted, more tired, they all agreed, than if they had made three times the distance on good animals.

Very quaint was this inn. A low, broad passage that led from the wide street door to an inner court, around which were grouped all the domestic offices, kitchens, stables, etc., was evidently sitting and dining room in one. Wooden benches were placed along the sides, and several of the distinctively Mexican and very comfortable chairs formed of bamboo and pig-skin were grouped around the entrance. At the farther end a long table was a stationary feature. From this passage-way on both sides opened chambers not more scantily furnished than is usual in Mexican inns, and scrupulously clean—the small single beds being not harder than one finds them in more pretentious places. Everything had a very primitive flavour. While the party sat around the doorway, talking, resting, and watching evening shadows lengthening over the scene beyond, horses were led through from the inner court to be watered at the lake a few rods distant, and then led back again. Supper, when ready, was placed at one end of the long table, and lighted somewhat dimly from a lamp suspended above. Taste rather than sight convinced the hungry travellers that what was placed before them was thoroughly eatable. Excellent coffee, good bread, fresh fish from the lake with every bone carefully removed before cooking, made a supper fitting for and creditable to Arcadia.

Afterwards, as there was glorious moonlight making all things bright as day, they sauntered forth to admire and enjoy the picturesque beauty of the spot. A few yards distant, at the

point of the rocky promontory, the steamer lay—a boat of about one hundred tons, conspicuously displaying her name, *La Libertad*, on her side.

"I am certain of one thing," said Phil, “that none of you ever before saw a steamer that had been transported hundreds of miles on mule-back. That is the case with this boat, which was brought by an enterprising Scotchman more than thirty years ago from California to San Blas, and thence over the mountains here."

"I suppose you mean that it was brought in sections," said his father.

"Naturally. But it was a plucky undertaking. She has had a very chequered history altogether, *La Libertad*—so called probably from the fact that she was confiscated from her owner in the name of liberty during the wars."

But in the face of the wonderful beauty of the night the history of *La Libertad* did not excite the interest it might else have awakened. Mrs. Langdon and Dorothea, attended by Russell and Travers, strolled down to the edge of the softly lapping water and stood lost in admiration of a picture so lovely that they were tempted to declare that they had never seen it equalled in any part of the world. Before them spread the lake, a sheet of shining silver, while the mountains on its shores, clearly revealed by the brilliant radiance, were yet so ethereal in tint that they had an aspect of unearthly beauty. On one side the lake seemed completely enclosed by these heights that rose immediately from its margin and formed a frame, with their crests against the hyacinth-blue sky, for the silver water washing their feet. In reality, however, it extends many miles beyond its seeming end in this direction—the irregularity of its form causing the deceptive appearance. On the other side it stretched away into remote distance, a shining expanse that finally melted into the sky, together with the misty heights which lined each shore. Near at hand a dark, bold shadow was thrown over the water from the mountain that rose immediately above the town—the abrupt and rocky face of which, owing to the humidity of the air, was covered with a wealth of tropical vegetation. Below, the town lay bathed in moonlight—its rows of flat houses with their barred windows, and its church with the graceful campanile, suggesting a blending of Italy and the East.

"But it is neither," said Russell when Dorothea for the hundredth time spoke of this; "it is Mexico—a country as picturesque as either, but with a most distinct character of its own. Don't forget this; don't try to fancy that you are on the shores of the Lago di Garda."

"Why should I?" she asked. "Chapala is as beautiful and more romantic, more wild, more full of the charm of nature, more out of the beaten path of humanity. But it is like Garda—I see you have thought of it yourself ! Only one looks in vain for the high peaks of the Tyrolean Alps with their crests of snow."

"You must remember that we are in the tropics, and more than six thousand feet above the sea. If we had the altitude of Garda, these mountains would present a much more imposing appearance."

"I do not see how one could wish them more beautiful than they are," said Margaret, looking at the exquisite heights, for which it was indeed impossible to desire any change.

"I begin to think it the most idyllic spot we have yet seen," said Travers. “This is where I shall erect my hermitage when I have grown even more weary of men and women than I am at present. And that such a time will come I have always known with great certainty." And he began to murmur:

"'The world is too much with us: late and soon
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours:
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers—
For this, for everything, we are out of tune.
It moves us not—'

Or, at least, it does not move us as it might if our lives and thoughts were simple."

"I am not sure of that," said Russell. The 'pagan suckled in a creed outworn' might indeed see 'Proteus coming from the sea' and 'hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn,' but he would not see the beauty of Nature as the modern man sees it. For love of Nature, as we well know, belongs to the modern world. The ancients, great as they were, knew nothing of it. Only the complex modern spirit feels the deep, piercing charm of such a scene as this."

"But you cannot deny that he would feel it most, who could most completely throw off the influence of the world," Travers returned. "Some time I shall try the experiment. I shall disappear, my friends will wonder for a day what has become of me— adding, 'But he was always eccentric, poor fellow, you know!'—and meanwhile I shall have buried myself in a hermitage on the banks of Lake Chapala—"

"Or in the depths of the Barranca de Portillo," suggested Mrs. Langdon.

He made a gesture of dissent. "No, charming as the barranca was, it is too much in the world. My hermitage will not be near any thoroughfare. This place would answer admirably—only some day it is doomed to become a tourists' resort."

"I am glad we have seen it before that day," said Dorothea.

So, idly talking, or often not talking, the sympathetic four—for Miss Graham and Philip wandered off apart—paced slowly along the beach. What indeed were words in face of the divine glory of the night, of the mystical shining beauty of the lake, of the great mountains with every stern outline softened by flooding radiance, of the vast, tranquil majesty of the whole picture?

The scene when they came out to embark the next morning was hardly less beautiful. The lake lay sparkling in the sunshine, and its surrounding heights clothed in green nearby wore, as they receded away, the divinest tints of colour which imagination can conceive. The atmosphere was like an elixir of vitality, so fresh yet so balmy. In the mere act of breathing life seemed to become a thing of greater worth.

"What an air!" said the general, expanding his lungs. "And this is the month of December, and we are more than six thousand feet above the sea! Where else will one find a climate so perfect?"

"Nowhere else, I think," answered Russell. "And I have known many lands."

From the point which served as a wharf they embarked on board the steamer. It was small and certainly not luxurious in appointments, but clean and comfortable—the cabin airy, and the decks surrounding it, though narrow, affording room for promenade, and well provided with

seats. The general expressed himself as very much pleased. "It is better than I expected," he said. "To tell you the truth, I had the gravest misgivings concerning the kind of craft we should find."

"If anything this is too civilised," said Dorothea. “I looked for something more primitive."

"Like that, perhaps?" asked Russell, indicating a very primitive craft lying near them.

"That is certainly more picturesque," she answered smiling.

"The whole scene is wonderfully picturesque," he said, leaning over the rail by her side. "That mountain rising over us, the mass of tangled tropical growth below it, the exquisite green tint of the water in its shadow, that boat with its crew, the town as it lies in the sunlight. What a paradise for a painter! Ah, we are off! Adieu, Chapala."

He waved his hand to the lovely spot as the boat slowly steered around and moved out into the lake. "But I shall come back again some day!" he added, as if to himself.

“What a delightful thing it must be," said Dorothea, regarding him with her bright glance, "to feel absolutely free to go and come where one will, when one finds a pleasant spot to stay in it as long as one likes, and to go back across the world to it if one desires! Mr. Russell, you are the most enviable man I know."

“Because I am a globe-trotter? That is a distinction shared with many people nowadays."

"No: because you have kept your life unfettered. Because you can do as you please."

"Ah!" He shrugged his shoulders slightly. "To do as one pleases is not, after all, the extreme felicity that one is apt to imagine until one has tried it. Sometimes it is very difficult to please one's self. Yet I confess that any fetters upon my freedom would now be very irksome to me."

"Of course they would," said she with an air of positive conviction, "and in your case I should never think of placing them upon myself."

He looked at her smiling. “You forget," he said, “how in all ages men have found compensation for such fetters. But see what a picture opens as we advance into the lake!"

The scenes around them were at this moment wonderfully beautiful, and seemed to grow more lovely as the boat advanced on her leisurely voyage. Crossing the lake, she took her way along the right shore, giving on one side a near view of the forest-clad heights rising boldly and abruptly from the water's edge, on the other of the broad, sun-kissed expanse of the lake, varying from fifteen to thirty miles in width, framed by mountains wearing the softest and most exquisite colours—tender purples, delicate blues, varying in tint according to distance and the lights and shadows thrown upon them.

"I had no idea that there was such colour in the world!" said Margaret Langdon, as she sat with her eyes fastened on the changing beauty of the dream-like heights. “How would you describe the tint on those hills at this moment? It is neither azure nor mauve, but a tint suggesting both, and far more beautiful than either; while as for those still more distant, they are like enchanted mountains, wearing colours never seen elsewhere, so tender, so magically fair."

“It is an enchanted and an enchanting scene," Travers, who sat beside her, answered. “I do not think that in the way of atmospheric effects and colour I have ever seen anything equal to it. And what a day!—what a sky of turquoise blue, what floods of sunshine, and what a divine air! I fear Chapala will make me as much of a Mexican enthusiast as Russell."

"Come now to the other side," said Russell, stepping out of the door of the cabin at this moment and addressing them.

“We are approaching Las Palmas—the most picturesque spot on the lake."

"Is there a superlative yet before us?" asked Travers, as they rose and followed him to the other side of the deck, where they found the rest of the party absorbed in admiring the charming place which the boat was now approaching.

Nothing could be imagined more picturesque than the spot. Over rocks that lined the shore the water was plashing and breaking in sparkling waves, immense trees with great gnarled roots that in themselves would have made a picture spread their green canopy of shade over rocks and water, while a little higher, under the clusters of feather-palms which gave a name to the place, was the Indian village—low houses thatched with palm leaves grouped around a tiny chapel. Behind, in close proximity, rose the hills, and a wealth of luxuriant vegetation made this the greenest, shadiest, most sylvan nook conceivable.

"Oh, how I wish I were an artist—to stop and set up my easel and paint it!" cried Dorothea. "Could anything be more exquisite? The water, the rocks, those magnificent trees with their spreading roots, the tropical vegetation, the houses, the people! Look at that group in the nearest doorway! Oh, please somebody ask the captain if there is time enough for us to go on shore!"

"There might be time enough," said Russell. "But you get a better effect from here, with less fatigue."

“Oh, I am sure it is *much* better to be satisfied with the effect from here," said Miss Graham with fervour.

The captain settled the point at this instant by sheering off; and soon the beautiful place, with its palms and rocks and mountains, was lost to sight as the boat rounded a point which shut it off.

And so the day went on—a journey through entrancing scenes, leisurely enough for perfect enjoyment. They sat on the decks idly talking, watching the fairy beauty of the distant shores, the varying yet ever exquisite outlines of the mountains, the play of light and colour on the water, and the successive villages embowered in shade at which they paused.

A fairly good dinner was served at noon, while they were still the only passengers. Later other passengers came on board, and by evening the decks were full.

“Here you see the provincial class of Mexicans exclusively," said Russell. “People who have never travelled and know nothing of what we call the world. Yet see what good manners they possess—how quiet they are and how courteous."

"They are a very friendly and sociable as well as a very courteous people," said General Meynell. “The more I see of them the better I like them."

"These are very provincial, however," said Dorothea. "How refreshingly unconventional of that girl to comb and arrange her hair in public!"

“And of the elder woman to join the captain in a draught of tequila from his bottle!" replied Russell laughing. "But that is what I remark—they are middle-class people; yet if we compare them with the same class in other countries they seem refined by contrast. Look at the manners of those young men in talking to those girls; how quiet, respectful, and graceful they are!"

About the middle of the afternoon they stopped at a village where they took on some passengers, and then suddenly the boat put about and steamed directly across the lake. "Now, what is this for?" inquired the general. "Are we going to call at some of the towns on the other side?"

"No," answered Philip. “The boat calls at them on her return voyage. We are now going to enter the current of the river. You know we leave the lake presently and go up the river—our old acquaintance, the Rio Grande de Santiago—but first we follow it for some distance across the lake."

“Why should we follow the river so long as we are still on the lake?"

"You will see in a little while. Meanwhile, have you observed all day these fragments of vegetable matter which are floating about on the water?"

"I have remarked several times that there seems to be a great deal of such matter, uniform in size and shape, and looking like parasites torn from trees by floods."

"There have been no floods—at least not since last summer—and this vegetable matter, as you will soon perceive, is what makes it necessary to take the course of the river across the lake. It is rather an extraordinary river on the whole, inasmuch as it carries its banks along with it, and you will be able to perceive all the processes of their formation."

"Here—in the lake?"

"In the lake assuredly."

And truly in a little while the boat entered a clearly marked channel between two floating banks of the same vegetable growth which they had already noticed on the lake. But instead of being in small, detached fragments, it was now united in large masses. “It is a kind of aquatic plant—Nature's first step towards the formation of islands and marshes," said Russell. “You will, as Phil says, see all the steps of this formation as we advance."

Indeed, it was soon evident that the marsh was forming fast. Larger and wider grew the floating banks, composed at first entirely of the aquatic plant mentioned; but presently, as this became firmer and had existed longer, a luxuriant growth of marshy grass appeared on the expanse thus formed, together with shrubs which had been at some former time swept away with their roots from the solid earth where they had originally existed, and, entangled in the masses of vegetable drift, were not only living but finding sustenance.

"How extraordinary it is and how interesting!" said Margaret. “See the undulations of that grass as the waves carry it up and down. How singular to think that it is all afloat!"

"For my part," said Dorothea, "I wish that something could be done to check this innovation on the part of the river. It may be interesting to see the formation of its banks, but it will spoil the lake."

"There is so much lake that we can afford to lose a little of it for the sake of the novelty of this effect," said Russell. "And it is, in a certain sense, instructive as well. You have read of the *chinampas* or floating gardens in the lakes around Mexico at the time of the Conquest. Here you may see exactly what they were, and how they were formed. In the course of centuries they have ceased to float, just as this formation after a time will become permanent. See! —as we advance, our banks become more solid and more picturesque!"

As they advanced, the banks ceased to float so obviously on the water, and had more the appearance of marshes covered with long, waving grass, reeds, and many other plants, a very

luxuriance of verdure, while beyond them the lake gleamed in the sunshine and the frame of azure mountains seemed to take more beautiful tints every moment. “By Jove, what a paradise for a sportsman!" said the general. "If only I had my gun with me!"

"I should rather call it a paradise for water-fowl," said Travers. "Evidently very few guns are ever heard here."

The multitude of birds, disporting themselves on the water seemed to justify this opinion. They were of every kind, especially wild duck and snipe, and abounded everywhere.

Presently the sun began to sink towards the horizon, and what a picture, a series of pictures, was before them then! The banks had here grown solid enough to bear trees with beautiful feathery foliage; the marshes—for such they still remained—were vividly green; and boats were seen here and there pushing through the grass and wide-leaved plants. Gleaming water caught the light, still beyond was the open lake and the solemn encircling heights now turning softly purple in the sunset glory, while against a sky of gold deepening to crimson the delicate foliage of the trees on the banks were outlined with exquisite effect, and the whole scene was like something altogether enchanted and mystical—a semi-aqueous world where only the distant heights had firm and solid foundation.

After this beautiful picture the rest of the journey seemed somewhat dreamlike. The richly-toned twilight gave place to silver moonlight, the wide poetic marshes to walled banks and cultivated fields; presently the boat paused at a landing where two large carriages and numerous dark figures of men and horses made a group against the wide-spreading distance.

"Here we are!" cried Philip cheerily. "Yonder is Don Rafael. Our day on Lake Chapala is at an end."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XIII.

AT THE HACIENDA.

IF the arrival at the hacienda was like a dream in the white moonlight of the night, when the great mass of buildings was all made up of silver lights and dark shadows, and the lamps gleaming in the pillared courts and lofty apartments only served to show dimly their vast spaces, it was a very striking reality in the brilliant sunshine of the next morning when the members of the party, emerging from their various apartments, found themselves on a wide arcaded corridor surrounding the four sides of a court fit for a baronial castle.

"Oh, how delightfully mediaeval?" cried Dorothea, as she looked around at the great open paved space, at the immense, fortress-like walls, at the vista of corridors shaded by orange-trees, and at the belfries of the chapel which rose above the roof of the house against a sky of dazzling lapis-lazuli.

"Don't let Don Rafael hear you call his residence mediaeval," said her brother with a laugh. "He might not understand that you mean to flatter it. There are Americans who would not

use the term in a flattering sense—and with these Americans Mexicans are more familiar than with those who admire the antiquity of their dwellings and customs."

"If he thinks we are uncultivated modern barbarians, able to appreciate nothing but a steam-engine, I hope you will be kind enough to undeceive him," replied Dorothea with dignity, "since I, for one, cannot possibly restrain my admiration for this splendid place."

"Here he is now," said Philip, advancing to meet the elderly gentleman, of aspect as stately and dignified as his house, who came towards them. A tall, well-knit figure, set off to advantage by the picturesque costume of the country, a clear-cut bronze face with an eagle eye and partially grey hair, the bearing of a hidalgo and the manner of a courtier, such was Don Rafael de Vargas. In very good English he welcomed the party again, told them that his house was their own, and begged to know if they had rested well during the night. Assured on this point, he expressed regret that his wife and daughters, who now came up in smiling phalanx, could not speak English, but hoped that the American ladies had sufficient command of Spanish to communicate with them.

Philip, for the American ladies, expressed their sincere regret that this was not the case; and then for several minutes was kept very busy interpreting the hospitable greetings and compliments of Doña Herminia and her three daughters. Two of these were married—charming young matrons with manners as attractive as their faces; but the youngest, Doña Mercedes, was in the first flush of girlhood, and of a very bewitching loveliness, delicate, high-bred, and piquant.

"There she is!" said Philip, in a discreet aside to his elder sister, when he was at last able to cast his mantle of interpreter upon the shoulders of Russell. “Isn’t she a beauty? She beats Violet Graham hollow, as I knew she would!"

Mrs. Langdon, suppressing a laugh, replied that Doña Mercedes was certainly a beauty in the full sense of that much-abused term—"and a perfect picture," she added, as she stood looking at the girl with undisguised admiration. There was indeed a strikingly picturesque quality in her loveliness. The soft brunette skin was fine and pale as ivory, save where a coral-like colour bloomed on the rounded cheeks, dark curling hair clustered around a beautiful forehead, perfect brows lay, straight as a Greek statue's, above the large and brilliant dark eyes with their long, curling lashes, the delicate nose expressed refinement with something of pride, while the lips, "like a scarlet thread," parting over milk-white teeth, and the shape of the dimpled chin, indicated that the young lady possessed a very decided will of her own. In fact, there was something in her whole appearance suggestive at once of a spoiled child, and of a saucy, somewhat mutinous, disposition. “And this is the girl we were afraid Philip would marry!" thought Margaret, with a humorous sense of the situation. "She looks like a young princess, and I fancy would not think of condescending to a poor foreigner, a mere civil engineer, as Phil no doubt appears to these people."

It was certain that, kind as the De Vargas family had been to the young engineer, they received a new and much higher idea of his social environment from the appearance of his family and friends. The ladies, especially, gauged with fine accuracy the position of these very elegant and distinguished-looking strangers of their own sex. “They are evidently persons of the highest consideration in their own country," Doña Herminia confided aside to her daughters. "I am much pleased to know them."

And Doña Mercedes remarked frankly to Philip, who executed a flank movement as soon as possible, which placed him at her side, "They are charming, your sisters. I cannot tell which I admire most. The one in blue is perhaps most beautiful, but the one in black has most distinction."

"The lady in blue is not my sister," replied Philip. “She is a friend only. At home she is considered a great beauty; but in Mexico," pursued this bold and unfaithful young man, "she does not seem so beautiful, by comparison with the ladies of this country."

He was rewarded by the laughing gleam that came into Doña Mercedes' bright young eyes. “Do you find them, then, all so beautiful, the ladies of Mexico?" she asked. "I am afraid you are a great flatterer, señor. For my part, I think there can be few anywhere more beautiful than this friend of yours."

"She is a friend of my sisters," said Philip the mendacious. At this moment the party was reinforced by the approach of three young men, one of whom proved to be a son-in-law, while the other two were sons of the house—handsome young fellows who had received their education in Europe, and one of whom was attached to the Mexican legation in Paris. Both spoke English, the latter, Don Rodolfo, particularly well, and on him Miss Graham smiled approvingly. It was the last thing she had expected, to find so unmistakable a man of the world in this Mexican hacienda, which seemed to her imagination as remote from the scenes which his appearance and manner suggested as if it had been located on another planet. So, with pleasant surprises on all sides, and a generally agreeable sense of good will, the party moved towards the dining-room, where breakfast awaited them.

At the door the members of the family all drew back and motioned their guests to precede them into a vast apartment, where a table, at which fifty persons might have been seated, occupied the centre of the floor. There was little else in the room. A tile-paved floor, frescoed walls, two or three sideboards of very simple construction, and an army of chairs, these things, with the great table, made up the fittings of the apartment. On one side was the square aperture in the wall through which, according to Mexican custom, the food is passed from the kitchen—which invariably adjoins the dining-room; on the other side tall windows opened upon a beautiful garden enclosed by a high wall, where flowers were blooming in profusion and birds singing in the trees.

"How wonderfully feudal it all seems!" Dorothea remarked in a low voice to her sister, as they grouped themselves about one end of the long table, and coffee and chocolate were served by white-clad, crimson-cinctured servants. "I could not have imagined anything at the present time so suggestive of the past. This table seems made for an unlimited hospitality, and I am expecting the retainers to presently march in and take their places below the salt."

"We are still very feudal in Mexico, señorita," said a voice beside her, and turning she found, somewhat to her confusion, that her remark had been overheard by Don Armando, the eldest son of the house.

"Oh!" she said, bearing in mind Philip's caution, and blushing quickly, for this English-speaking señor was looking at her very pleasantly with his bright dark eyes, "I hope you do not think that I used the term in any unflattering sense. It seems to me delightful to find anything left in the modern world so picturesque as this life of yours, so full of the spirit of times that seem as far from us as the middle ages."

He smiled, evidently understanding that she spoke with honest enthusiasm. “You must talk to my father," he said. “He is a great adherent of our ancient ways. I, too, like them—but I recognise that we cannot hope to keep things from changing. At present, however, there is still much that is picturesque, and feudal in the best sense, in this our Mexican life. I am glad that you like it. Many Americans think us—how do you call it?—antiquated."

"1 am not that kind of an American," said Dorothea with great distinctness. “There are numbers of antiquated things that I admire exceedingly, and which I think we have very poorly replaced. But as for this life of yours—this distinctively Mexican life—it interests me beyond measure, and I hope you will not think me very inquisitive and troublesome if I ask many questions about it."

"It will give me the greatest pleasure to tell you anything, everything, that you may wish to know," said Don Armando with the most evident sincerity.

"I perceive one thing very plainly," said Travers after breakfast to Mrs. Langdon, as they all strolled slowly around the orange-shaded corridors of the great quadrangle towards the sola, "that if you do not take compassion on me, I shall be driven to commune with my own thoughts alone. Here is the general monopolised by and zealously extracting information from Don Rafael, while Russell is engaged in exchanging compliments with our hostess, Phil has eyes, ears, and tongue only for that very pretty girl, and the two young men are evidently determined to absorb the attention of our contingent of young ladies, so unless you allow me to address a remark now and then to you I shall be driven to simply exchange smiles and bows with the very affable gentleman who is walking on your other side, Señor—what is his name?"

"Never mind," said Mrs. Langdon with a smile. “If I mentioned it he would know that we were talking of him, and I have not Spanish enough to explain why. It is surely a pity that the tower of Babel was ever begun! But whenever you feel the need of conversation, pray do not hesitate to address yourself to me. By present appearances, I am no more likely to be monopolised than yourself."

In this opinion Mrs. Langdon reckoned without her hostess. When they reached the *sala*, an immense apartment, as superb in space and proportion as the rest of the house, she was at once led to the seat of honour, a sofa at the head of the room, where, seated between Doña Herminia and her eldest daughter, she was obliged to employ all the Spanish at her command and to engage Russell's aid as interpreter besides, to maintain a conversation with these friendly people.

Meanwhile, Don Rafael was only too delighted to initiate the general into the inner life of the hacienda, its modes of working, and all the details of the life of its people, most of whom had been on the estate for generations, and would under no circumstances think of leaving it. He was taken into the great office and store-room, where the accounts were kept, and where the labourers purchased all their supplies, furnished them at the lowest profit possible by "*el amo*"—the master. “At the height of the season our *rayas* [pay-rolls] average two thousand dollars a week," said Don Rafael, "so you see there is need of a book-keeper."

"And a bank also, I should think," said the general.

He was then taken into a world outside of, yet closely surrounding, the *casa grande*—a world of granaries and store-houses, as full to overflowing as the granaries of Egypt in the years of fatness; of shops where, with comparatively primitive tools, the work of the hacienda was

done; blacksmithing, carpentering, shoe-making—all the trades were represented, and very good was some of the work accomplished, notably some carriage-building which, in its results, astonished the general. Then there were the schools for both sexes, maintained by the proprietor, and filled respectively with dusky boys and girls who were all studying aloud in the ancient fashion which, like many other ancient fashions, still lingers in Mexico.

"To-morrow," said Don Rafael, when the general, a little tired, was finally conducted back, across the wide plaza-like space around which these buildings were grouped, to the shade of the great house, "we will start early—say at five o'clock, so as to avoid the heat of the sun—and ride out on the hacienda. You will probably be interested to see our modes of agriculture and sugar-making."

"Nothing could interest me more," said the general heartily. Indeed he told Russell a little later that while the cities which they visited had been very brilliant and picturesque, this glimpse of the inner life of the country, of the management of its great estates, was infinitely more interesting to him. "It is like another world," he said, "totally different in every respect from ours. There is something fascinating about its semi- patriarchal, semi- feudal character."

"A mixture of the East and the middle ages," said Russell smiling. "You can understand now why there is such a romantic flavour about many of the stories which are told of these great proprietors. I must get Don Rafael to tell you some of them."

Meanwhile the younger members of the party had not been idle in sight-seeing, although their attention was not directed to the inspection of the granaries and shops. Led by one of the married sisters and by Doña Mercedes and Philip, Miss Graham and Dorothea, with Travers and their two young hosts, passed from the interior of the house to a long, graceful arcade which extended along the entire front of the vast building. Here they paused for a time to admire the magnificent view of valley and mountains that stretched before them, and were then conducted to the chapel, which rose at one end of the house, and was capable of containing six or seven hundred people. Finely proportioned, like all Mexican churches, built of stone throughout, with lofty, frescoed ceiling, noble organ, and splendid churrigueresque altar, it was in all respects an example of that princely generosity which the highest class of Mexicans have for centuries displayed towards religion, and which the best of them practise to-day as much as ever. Simple marble slabs let into the pavement told where rested below the dust of those who in their earthly day had owned this magnificent heritage, and who now slept in the peace of God before the altar where they had so often knelt in life. In a dim, spacious sacristy, almost as large as the church itself, the sacristan, a brown old man in the most spotless of white clothes, showed them sacred vessels and vestments rich enough for a cathedral. A stair behind the sacristy led to the chaplain's apartments above—two rooms, one a chamber, the other a study lined with books—which commanded so entrancing a view over the vast stretch of pastoral valley to the purple hills beyond, that it was difficult for Dorothea to tear herself away from it.

"It is a home for a poet or a saint, or for one who should be both," she declared as she stood in an open window, glancing from the book-cases filled with Latin and Spanish volumes within to the wide, wonderful, sun-bathed picture without.

"A cell on a mountain top could not be more secluded. Not a sound reaches us from the house so full of life near by. Nothing is before one's eyes but nature and heaven."

"I must beg our good *capellan*, when he returns from the sick-call which has taken him out on the hacienda, to resign his quarters for a time to the señorita," said Don Armando, smiling. He found the enthusiastic admiration of this pretty American very attractive. “I am sure he will be delighted to do so."

"Ah, but I am neither a poet nor a saint," said Dorothea, "so what should I do here? No, señor, I think we will not disturb the good *capellan*, but whenever I dream of the most attractive place I have ever seen it will be this. Now shall we follow the others? Your sister said something of the garden."

Into a garden that might have been that of Armida they followed the advance guard that preceded them across a wide paved *atrio*, enclosed by a handsome balustrade and adorned by a fountain, and down a long flight of steps. At the foot of this natural terrace, enclosed by a stone wall with an iron gate, was a beautiful and extensive *huerta*. Broad alleys lined with orange-trees led in every direction through a wilderness of tropical foliage—for in this vast pleasance was every variety of fruit-tree known to the country, every product, it appeared, both of the

Palace, City of Mexico

temperate and tropical zones. Streams of water affording the necessary irrigation ran through enchanting bits of landscape, where great clumps of bananas unfurled their broad, green satin leaves to the sunshine, tall mango-trees, guavas, palms, and a multitude of others of which the

strangers knew not the names, formed masses of luxuriant green varied here and there by the golden or purple flowers of some climbing vine. In this paradise of verdure birds were singing on every side, forming a chorus of happy praise, the air was filled with fresh fragrance, in the long green alleys there was no heat, and presently, when they reached an open space around a fountain, where near the brimming basin stone seats, that had taken the soft tint of age, were placed under trellised grape-vines, Dorothea was not the only person who uttered an exclamation of delight. “One might fancy one's self in Italy," she said. “It is like a Roman garden."

"There is something classic in the suggestion of the fountain and these stone benches," said Travers: "but all this tropical foliage is unlike Italy, and one cannot fancy a Roman garden without the ilex and the box."

“People without imagination cannot fancy anything," said Dorothea, who felt herself and her enthusiasm as usual slightly snubbed by Mr. Travers.

“I don't see the least need for imagining anything better than the reality," observed Miss Graham with the common sense which distinguished her. "It seems to me quite the prettiest place we have seen."

"I am delighted that you find it so," said Don Rodolfo, who was carrying her parasol and generally devoting himself to this beautiful stranger; "but when you go to Mexico you will find *huertas* more beautiful than this—for we do not keep it so much for a pleasure-ground as for the fruits which it yields. In summer every imaginable variety can be gathered here."

“There seems to be a great deal to be gathered at present," said the young lady, seating herself on one of the classic-looking benches. "If some one would kindly bring me an orange—and perhaps a banana or two—I think I could enjoy it."

Don Rodolfo clapped his hands, and as if by magic there appeared in one of the green vistas radiating from this central spot the ubiquitous white-clad, sandalled figure with which they were by this time familiar.

“There are always two or three men at work in here somewhere," he said smiling, in answer to Dorothea's look of surprise. And addressing the man who approached, he directed him to bring some of the best varieties of oranges and bananas.

“Si, seftor," was the response, and the speaker disappeared—but returned quickly, bearing a basket filled with the beautiful fruit; and in this charming spot, with stray sunbeams filtering down through a canopy of green vine-leaves, beside the grey old stone basin filled with sparkling water, and lovely depths of foliage wherever the eye rested, they all enjoyed their fragrant *al fresco* lunch.

"I feel as if I had dreamed myself into a 'Paul and Virginia' pastoral," said Dorothea presently. "Our surroundings are so idyllic that we ought to be somewhat romantic ourselves and not indulge in such very tame and prosaic conversation." (They had been discussing the facilities for marketing the orange crop of the country.)

"I am sure I am ready to be romantic at the least encouragement," said Philip. “But nobody encourages me."

"It is rather difficult to be romantic in public," said Travers. "Solitude, or solitude *à deux*, is absolutely necessary for anything of that kind. But our surroundings suggest to me Boccaccio's story-tellers in their Florentine villa. Let us have some stories with a flavour of this wonderful country."

“But who shall be the story-teller?" asked Dorothea. "Don Rodolfo?—Don Armando?—which?"

The two young men looked at each other, laughing and shrugging their shoulders. Each protested that ability for story-telling he had none. “But here comes some one who can oblige you," said Don Armando, glancing down the broad avenue leading to the gate, along which two figures were advancing. They were General Meynell and Don Rafael. "My father can tell, and will enjoy telling, you stories by the hour. He has lived through the old and the new times of Mexico, and his memory is stored with what you would call very romantic episodes. Three times during the revolutions he was led out to be shot."

" I should call that more exciting than romantic," observed Dorothea. “And how did he escape?”

“Oh," replied the son, shrugging his shoulders again, “it was only a question of money. They wanted to extort more than he was willing to pay. It was necessary to pay all the time in those days. There was no such thing as peace, especially for a rich man. First one armed band and then another would ride up to his door and, at the point of the pistol, demand money, horses, mules, provisions—and whatever their requirements, it was necessary to satisfy them, to some extent at least."

“It is very astonishing," said Travers, “that there remained any rich men after a certain number of these visitations."

"There did not remain a great many," said the other. "The rule in this country is that those who were rich before the revolutions are poor now, and that many rich and influential men, especially those belonging to the dominant party, have fortunes founded on open robbery. Only some of the great proprietors, like my father, whose landed estates were vast, unless they happened to have those estates confiscated, came out of that period without being reduced to poverty."

"Were there many cases of confiscated estates?" Travers asked.

"Very many. Here is my father. Ask him to tell you the story of the Burro de Oro."

"The Golden Donkey," said Dorothea. “What a singular name! Was it applied to a man?"

“Yes, to a man, one of the richest in all this part of the country. Will you tell them the story of the Burro de Oro?" he asked, turning to his father, who at this moment entered the circle.

Don Rafael looked around with a smile as he sat down. His bold, clear-cut face, with the dark, eagle eyes—one could fancy how unflinchingly they had faced the muskets levelled to shoot him those three several times!—came out with fine effect against the deep green background rising above the soft grey stone of the bench on which he sat. "What a fine, powerful head!" whispered Dorothea to Travers. "How I should like to have an oil-sketch of it!"

“I have told you all along that the absence of an artist was a great mistake in the composition of our party," he replied in the same tone. “What a scene for a picture this is altogether!"

"And so my son has been telling you something of the Burro de Oro," said Don Rafael, regarding the strangers with his bright, steady glance. “It is a sad story to one who knew the man as I did. How came he to bear such a name? Well, you must know that our people are almost as much addicted to the use of nicknames, characterising the individual, as the Italians; and this name was given to one whose immense wealth and childish love of display, together with the

fact that he was considered to be, in some degree, at least, mentally deficient, made him a famous character in his day. Innumerable stories were told, and are still preserved in popular tradition, of his caprices and extravagances. Many of them were true, and in this respect he was not an isolated example. One must go to Oriental countries to find anything analogous to the boundless wealth, and profuse, almost barbarous expenditure of many of our great proprietors of a generation or two ago. And of this class Burro de Oro was the supreme type. Fortune absolutely showered favours on him. By direct and indirect inheritance he was possessed of fabulous wealth, and the love of display dominated his life. Not far from here there is a hacienda—one of the largest and richest in the State of Jalisco—which he owned, and where he erected a palace the splendour and luxury of which still bear testimony to his mode of life. Built in the most costly manner, everything about this house was of the most expensive description, and the number of his retainers was remarkable even in Mexico, where the house of every rich man is filled with servants. The attire of these servants was of a splendour to correspond with that of their master. The saddles of his *mozos* had trappings of silk and velvet, while his own saddle was of silver and gold. To the magnificence of his personal attire there were no bounds. He had hundreds of costumes loaded with the richest adornments, and even the heels of his boots were made of gold."

"There is a truly Oriental touch for you," said Travers, with a smile, to Dorothea.

"I don't wonder," said the general, “that his popular name was the Golden Donkey. The man must have been an absolute fool."

"In his childish love of display, yes," said Don Rafael. "It was his great weakness. But there was nothing worse than folly about him. On the contrary, the stories of his generosity are as many as the stories of his extravagance. He was very kind to his dependents and exceedingly charitable to the poor. Once, in a time of great suffering from the failure of crops, he opened his granaries and bade all who would come and find food and work."

"Ah," said Dorothea, "one can forgive much folly in a man capable of such an act as that."

"It was but one act of many, and that is why the people still speak of Burro de Oro in a very tender fashion, laughing at his absurdities but never forgetting his countless deeds of charity. His end, however, was very sad, and it may be said that his vanity brought about the tragedy which closed his life. He was an adherent of the Emperor Maximilian, and purchased from the imperial party the title of general, just as he purchased the highly decorated uniform which it gave him the right to wear. It was well known that he had never commanded troops—never, in fact, borne arms or had any military responsibility whatever; yet the Liberals, when their triumph was assured, arrested him, seized his great wealth, and ordered his execution. There was not a shadow of pretext for such an act—but pretexts for executions were not necessary in those days." Don Rafael paused for a moment, and a shade fell over his face as if cast by the memory of the evil times of which he spoke. He turned his eyes away from the countenances regarding him with such keen interest, and gazed down one of the verdure-framed vistas as if it were that vista of the past where he saw enacted the tragedy of which he was about to speak.

"It gave," he said, "a noble and pathetic touch to the end of this poor man that he died with great dignity and courage. Yet even in his death the ruling passion of his life showed itself. He ordered that a fine piece of tapestry should be spread on the spot where he was to kneel to be

shot, and then, dressed in his richest apparel, he went forth to meet the soldier's death of which he proved himself not unworthy."

There was a moment's silence as the speaker's voice fell. Pathetic indeed was the picture which his words painted for all who possessed imagination enough to see, like himself, the generous childish soul kneel down in his brave attire, to die with the courage of a gentleman and a soldier because his enemies coveted his great possessions.

"What a story!" said Dorothea at length softly, drawing a deep breath. "Its romance and its tragedy would hardly be possible in any other country."

"Mexico abounds in such stories," said Don Rafael, regarding her bright face with a smile. "One of the grandees of the past, who is the hero of many popular traditions, was the Count del Jaral, from whom are descended some of the greatest and richest families now existing in Mexico. He possessed no less than ninety great haciendas, and 'cattle upon a thousand hills' was no figure of speech in his case, but less than a statement of the literal fact. It is related of him that being once solicited by a poor student for aid to complete his education, he gave him (it was at the time of sheep-shearing) the wool from the tails of his sheep, and it constituted a fortune."

"The wool from the tails of his sheep!" repeated Dorothea. "How patriarchal it sounds! How different from giving him a check upon his bank!"

"It opens a very interesting field for speculation," said Travers. "If the wool from the tails of his sheep constituted a fortune, what did the entire wool of the sheep constitute? And there are the cattle upon a thousand hills to be considered, and the products of ninety great haciendas—I doubt if the Count del Jaral was able to tell the sum total of his own income."

"It is doubtful," said Don Rafael. "At least a hundred details must necessarily escape the attention of a man of such vast wealth—and wealth which, from its character, was almost incalculable. Another story told of him, with a very Oriental touch about it, is this: Meeting one day a large drove of very fine mules, he asked the man in charge of them what was their price. 'They are not for sale,' replied the man proudly, 'for my master has no need to dispose of his property.' 'And who is your master?' asked the count. 'El Conde del Jaral,' answered the man. Then said the count, 'I am the Conde del Jaral, and these mules are yours, because you know how to speak of your master in a becoming manner.'"

"A very magnificent personage!" said the general. "And, I presume, at that time only one of many such striking figures."

"The most striking of all in his day," replied Don Rafael. "But certainly in the history of the country only one of many. There is a point which seems to me very noticeable in all the popular stories told of these great proprietors," the speaker added after a moment's pause. "Rarely, if ever, are they accused of cruelty or oppression. On the contrary, the tales of their princely generosity and charity are countless; and it was chiefly from them that the Church obtained the property which it held for a hundred useful purposes, and of which it was robbed by the leaders of the revolution—men in every instance risen from poverty and obscurity—the descendants of those whom the Church alone had saved from slavery and extinction."

"And who at the first opportunity repaid the debt by spoliation!" said the general. "That is an old story in the history of the world."

"Yes, ingratitude is an old story," said Don Rafael; "but I think it has seldom been more conspicuously displayed than here in Mexico. On every page of the early history of the country

is written the vast debt which the native races owe to the Church that preserved, taught, Christianised, and civilised them. More than this, the individuals foremost in the crusade of robbery— for example, Benito Juarez—owed their own personal education, and consequent power, to the charity of the religion they persecuted."

"Put a beggar on horseback," said Travers, "and we know, generally speaking, where he will ride. But the beggars who have ridden rough-shod over Mexico are not half so interesting as the picturesque figures of the past, before Progress and Reform became watchwords for tyranny."

"Not half," said Dorothea. "So pray, señor, tell us some more about those figures."

It was not very often that Don Rafael found listeners so sympathetic and interested, and he was quite willing to gratify them by relating other stories steeped in all the romance of his wonderful land. The modern world seemed far away as they listened, in the green heart of this enchanted garden, conscious that around them spread the vast sunlit plains and shining hills which had been the theatre and setting for all these vivid, picturesque, dramatic events, for conditions of life which were like a mingling of the pastoral and the feudal of past ages, for tales in which the most primitive forces of human passion displayed themselves together with stirring heights of heroism and extremes of noble generosity, and with now and again a touch of spiritual sweetness and simplicity that seemed drawn from the tender Franciscan spirit which first taught still dominates the religious feeling of this deeply religious country.

"What a field for the story-teller— the genuine story-teller, not the *fin de siècle* realist— is here!" said Dorothea, when at last Don Rafael smilingly said that he must not tire them, and that they would now adjourn to the house. “It is one of the few fresh and untrodden fields for literature yet left in the world."

“Not altogether untrodden, if my memory serves me," observed Travers, who was walking by her side.

"Trodden only by one writer—the author of the Stories of Old New Spain— who has presented the types and conditions of life in the country with true artistic sympathy and fidelity," she replied. “But how much remains yet to be told of the old, picturesque life that Don Rafael has been painting for us!”

"It would require another Thousand and One Nights in which to tell it all, I fancy," said Travers. “I confess that what pleases me most are the suggestions of boundless wealth. Think of the man who paved his house with bricks of solid silver! There is a glimpse of opulence in that beside which the extravagances of our modern rich men seem very tame."

"But you remember the reason," said Dorothea with a laugh. "He was a great gambler, and his wife, fearful that he would gamble away all his fortune, great as it was, insisted on this very solid investment, so that when the worst came to pass they might have something to fall back upon."

"It is to be hoped her foresight was justified— but how easy to lift a brick in a quiet way whenever a stake was needed! I am afraid that, unless he departed this life before his other resources were exhausted, there did not remain much silver pavement for his family to inherit."

"It is all fascinating," said Dorothea, comprehensively, glancing up at the long, arcaded front of the *casa grande* with the picturesque open belfries of the church at one end, which they

were approaching. “This hacienda life is decidedly the most interesting bit of our Mexican experience."

"It is interesting because it is so novel, fresh, and totally different from every other life one has ever known," Travers agreed. "And the family are charming. I think "—glancing at Philip, as he sauntered in front of them, talking earnestly to Doña Mercedes—"that efforts to counteract the possible effect of Miss Graham's spells are as unnecessary as your solicitude with regard to them."

"It is also unnecessary," said Dorothea with some asperity, "to call my attention afresh to the fact, which I assure you I clearly recognise, that I have acted like an absolute idiot with regard to the whole matter. If humility is good for the soul, I feel myself at present possessed of enough for a saint."

"Hum!" said Travers rather doubtfully. "I believe that the humility of the saints was generally accompanied with some gentleness towards their fellow-creatures."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XIV.

IDYLLIC DAYS.

IT was certainly a life full of novelty which the party of Americans enjoyed for a few days on this Mexican hacienda. Their hosts also enjoyed the interest which they expressed in the picturesque phases of an existence totally unlike their own, and spared no effort to amuse them and gratify the curiosity they so frankly displayed. In the cool freshness of the marvellous Mexican mornings the general would ride out with his host over the vast fields with their varied crops, and the wide plains where herds of cattle pastured; and later, smoking in the orange-shaded court or the arcaded corridor with its extended and beautiful outlook, absorb information which not even Russell could have afforded of the inner social and political conditions of this little-understood country. As for the others, their amusements and occupations were as varied as the hours of the day. To them all was fresh, wonderful, and delightful. In this house, stately as a palace, yet in many respects plain as a monastery, the life of former centuries was still lived with hardly a change of detail. Some modern inventions had been introduced on the hacienda, and the ladies wore gowns of late Paris fashions; but otherwise the Spanish viceroys might still have been reigning in the city of Cortes, and the great galleons, their holds filled with the treasure of Mexican mines, might still have been crossing the seas, for any sign to the contrary here. And while the strangers, fresh from the feverish, restless world beyond the Rio Grande, said these things to each other, they felt, as less appreciative people might have failed to feel, the charm of this existence, full of the spirit of an older and simpler time, of repose and kindness and gentle deeds. Especially were they struck with the patriarchal relations existing between the proprietor and the people on his estate, most of whom had been born upon it, and were the descendants of those who had served the family for generations. Out of this long continuance of relation, and

above all out of the Christian spirit which animated it, came as natural fruit, fidelity and trust on one side, and consideration, justice, affection on the other.

"One perceives here very clearly," said the general one day to Russell, "that the relation of master and servant, instead of being the difficult thing which the modern world has made it —without, however, abolishing either mastership or servitude—may be a relation calling forth some of the best feelings of human nature on both sides. It looks as if the most vexing problem of civilisation might be easily solved if we were not above learning a lesson or two from the past."

“It is too much to expect of the arrogant modern spirit—especially the spirit which produces caste hatred and antagonism—that it should learn wisdom from any source outside of itself," replied Russell. "But really what we see here is a survival of the best side of feudalism."

"I have been struck with that," said the general. “The laws appear to be entirely feudal in spirit—calling for allegiance on one side and protection on the other."

"It is certainly a very feudal touch that the tenants must follow their patron to war," said Russell. "In the days of fighting a great proprietor would take the field, like a mediaeval baron, with a thousand or two of his own men at his back."

"But it is a great mistake to suppose that the laws are made for the master alone," the general continued. “It would astonish our modern employers to know all that the Mexican proprietor is bound to give and to do for his people. He must feed them in famine; if their cattle die, he must restock the farms so that they may continue the cultivation of the land; he must arbitrate their disputes, and lead and direct them both in war and peace. And, besides fulfilling the letter of these requirements, there seems—on this hacienda at least—to be the kind and just spirit of a father in all the proprietor's dealings with his people."

"I think that among the great proprietors, those of ancient blood and traditions, that spirit is the rule, proved only by rare exceptions," Russell observed. “Don Rafael was telling us a story," he went on, turning to Mrs. Langdon, "that illustrates the manner in which the people expect as a natural right indulgence and help from *el amo*. There was a man on one of his estates who had given much trouble, being both worthless and contumacious. Repeated admonitions and warnings had no effect upon him, and at last the extreme measure was taken of ordering him to leave. He paid no attention to the order, so finally Don Rafael directed that his house should be pulled down."

“After the manner of an Irish eviction?" said Margaret. "Do such things occur in Mexico?"

“Don Rafael said that he has never had to order such a thing done before or since, but this man was so defiant and incorrigible that there seemed nothing else to do. The conclusion, however, was very unlike an Irish eviction. On the day when the order was executed, Don Rafael came out on the corridor of his own house and found there a most unexpected sight. The evicted man had brought all his family and household goods and deposited them in the court of the *casa grande*. There was the whole of whatever constituted his furniture, there were the children and the fowls, and his wife calmly squatted on the ground making tortillas for the family repast. You may imagine Don Rafael's amazement, as he inquired the meaning of this extraordinary invasion. You should hear him render the dignity and quietness of the reply he received. 'By your command,' said the man, 'my house has been pulled down. Where, then, should I come with my

family but to your house? You cannot expect me to leave the estate where my father and my grandfather, and all who went before me, have served your fathers.' This speech, with its assumption of the inalienable duty of the patron to care for his people, was too much for Don Rafael. He ordered another house built for the bold invader, who, I presume, lives and nourishes still on the estate he declined to leave."

"It is difficult to imagine Don Rafael, with that eagle face of his, allowing his will and authority to be overridden," said Margaret. "But, really, what could he do but surrender? That the man should come to him as his natural defender and protector, even against himself, was too irresistible."

They were gathered as they talked, in a corner of the corridors surrounding the great inner court. It was a pleasant nook, where seats were placed—for in these corridors the life of a Mexican household is chiefly passed—and where, looking up through the glistening foliage of the orange-trees planted in each arch, the gaze might strive to pierce the depths of luminous sky overarching the open space, or rest in delightful contemplation on the wonderfully picturesque old wall of the church, rising in its greater height above the walls of the house.

"I think," said Mrs. Langdon again after a pause in which her gaze had dwelt upon this picture, as if all that it expressed or suggested was sinking deeply into her inner consciousness, "that we shall be spoiled for the world when we return to it, by the charm of this spot. I have a feeling as if I had known it all my life, yet it is curious to remember that these kind people are strangers to us, as we to them. They know absolutely nothing of us, except through Phil, whom they have taken on his own introduction."

"There are people whom it is impossible to mistake," said Russell, regarding her with a smile. "Credit our friends with a little penetration and worldly knowledge. But here comes Doña Herminia, with some proposal, no doubt, for our amusement."

Doña Herminia coming forward in her handsome, mature beauty, sat down on the seat by Mrs. Langdon and, addressing Russell in Spanish, asked if the señora would like to make an excursion on the lake. The young people, she said, were eager for it, and thought that it might be agreeable; the distance was not very far, and there was an island with the ruins of an old church upon it that would perhaps interest the señora, who seemed fond of all things picturesque.

Russell, replying for the señora, said that she would be glad to make any excursion that her kind hosts recommended, since everything which they showed was absolutely novel, picturesque, and charming.

"Then we will make arrangements for the excursion tomorrow," said Dona Herminia, "since, to our great regret, it will be your last day with us. We had hoped to keep you much longer. We should be very happy if you would spend Christmas—*La Noche Buena*, as we call it—with us. If you have never seen a fiesta on a hacienda it would interest you. "

The persons thus hospitably entreated made unanimous reply that while nothing would give them greater pleasure than to prolong their stay, they were bound by previous arrangements to proceed upon their journey, having already found the hacienda so charming and their welcome so warm, that they had outstayed the limits originally assigned for their visit.

This, Doña Herminia answered, could only be a cause of congratulation and pleasure to the entire De Vargas family, who were deeply honoured that they had paused and turned aside from their travels to make this visit.

"You will be kind enough to tell Doña Herminia for me," the general said to Russell at this point, "that I consider our visit here worth the journey to Mexico, if we had seen nothing else. Tell her that when I left home I was as ignorant and prejudiced—no, never mind about the prejudice!—as most Americans, I regret to acknowledge, are with regard to Mexico; and that the final touch to my enlightenment has been this most agreeable and instructive glimpse into the inner life of the country. It is we who are honoured by the kindness which has given us this delightful experience."

Translation on the part of Russell renewed complimentary assurances on the part of Doña Herminia, fresh expressions of appreciation on the part of the general, and so on *da capo*, until an interruption occurred in the form of a gay group that emerged from the *sala*, where they had been practising Mexican songs, and came talking and laughing along the corridor.

"If I were here a month," said Dorothea, pausing before her sister, "I should speak Spanish fluently. Oh, you need not smile, Margaret! Don Armando, is it not so?"

"Nothing could be more true," Don Armando replied with gravity. "The señorita learns with a wonderful facility, and already speaks and understands remarkably well. And as for the month, why should it not be a reality? Nothing would give my mother and sisters more pleasure than to detain such a charming guest."

"I am certain that the hospitality of your family would be equal to any demand, señor," Dorothea replied gaily, "but there is a limit beyond which one would not like to trespass. Yet when shall I ever see anything like this again?" she cried for the hundredth time, looking around the great court in its perfect picturesqueness. “For one brief space in my life I have dwelt in the golden age."

"There is another member of our party who fancies himself in the golden age, or I am much mistaken," observed Travers to Mrs. Langdon, while a glance indicated Philip, who was as usual near Doña Mercedes. “This explains why he has been proof against all the fascinations of the fair Violet. Does it strike you," the speaker went on in a more discreet tone, "how amusingly Mademoiselle Dorothea's little plot has developed? The reason for which Miss Graham was brought with us, the subsequent uneasiness lest the plan should prove too successful, and, for finale, the manner in which both precaution and uneasiness are proved unnecessary?"

"It is very amusing," Mrs. Langdon agreed. "And the best part of it is the manner in which Violet has ignored Philip since she has been here, and devoted herself to the capture of Don Rodolfo. This has the effect of exasperating Dorothea, although she is relieved by it. But I find her very sensitive on the subject, so pray do not laugh at her about it any more."

"I have never laughed at her," protested Travers. "I have only taken the liberty of laughing to myself."

"She comprehends perfectly, however, that you do laugh," Mrs. Langdon rejoined.

The excursion the next day was altogether a success. By driving a few miles, the party reached the lake, where, taking boats at a village on the shore, they crossed to an island which was like an idyl of peace as it lay cradled upon the smiling waters, covered with luxuriant verdure.

Landing on the beach before a small cluster of palm-thatched huts, they obtained a guide to lead them to the ruins of the ancient chapel of which Doña Herminia had spoken. It was a walk of more than a mile, most of it gradual but steady ascent, until they found themselves on the

summit of a plateau-like ridge that occupied the centre of the island, where a beautiful view of the lake burst suddenly upon them, and where, overshadowed by the spreading boughs of great trees, were the remains of an abandoned church, ancient, picturesque, and most pathetic in its decay. Forsaken by man, Nature had taken the old sanctuary lovingly into her heart; vines clambered over its dismantled walls, and into the empty spaces of the graceful belfry-gable, that seemed waiting for the bells that once swung in it, the surrounding trees had thrust their leafy branches, so that, when the fresh breeze from the lake swept over the height, there was a soft sylvan murmur where once the silvery strokes of metal had sounded, while a luxuriant growth of shrubs and young trees filled the nave where the dark-skinned converts of the first gentle fathers had knelt in days so long passed that only a tradition of them survived.

"Why should a church have been built here in the first place, and, having been built here, why should it have been abandoned?" asked the general.

"That seems very plain," Don Rafael answered. “The church was evidently placed here by the first missionaries for security. See how it commands a view on every side. No boat could approach the island without being observed from this point, while it is at the same time very accessible from the surrounding shores. But when the people all became Christian, the need for such precautions ceased, and therefore the church was removed to the mainland, leaving this primitive foundation to decay."

"It should never have been left to decay," said Mrs. Langdon. "In memory of its early history, and of the associations that must cluster around these walls, it should have been carefully preserved."

"The whole country is filled with such associations, señora," Don Rafael replied, "and therefore they are not valued as if they were more unusual. Hardly a *pueblito* but has its old church, as full of memories as this."

"But not a situation so romantic," cried Dorothea, her gaze wandering from the green, wind-swept hill-top, crowned by its great trees and silent ruins, to the wide picture afar, the lake spreading, a shining expanse, into remote distance, the hills swimming in softest tints of aerial azure. “Had I been the fathers, I could never have given it up for any practical consideration of convenience."

"This is, after all, the most ideal place I have yet seen for my hermitage," remarked Travers, baring his head to the caressing touch of the breeze. "A hammock under these trees, plenty of good tobacco, and a few noble books—what could one ask more, with such a view before one's eyes, such a sky above, and such an air around?"

"For me," said Don Armando, “I should ask a great deal more. I should want companionship, society, the voice of a friend, or—"

"Some one nearer and dearer," said Philip with a laugh. "Don't be ashamed to acknowledge it. The desire does you much more credit than Travers's yearning to abjure the society of his fellow-creatures does him. I should like to see him try that hermitage for a while. It would be interesting to learn how much time would elapse before he, too, would want to hear the voice of a friend—or even of an enemy."

“That is not original, you know, Phil," observed Dorothea reprovingly.

"Did I say it was original?" retorted Philip. "And, to make another quotation, since somebody has declared that in order to live in solitude a man must be either an angel or a devil, Travers may take his choice of the character he intends to assume."

"Could any one who knows Mr. Travers doubt his angelic attributes?" asked Miss Graham, with unkind sarcasm.

"What was it the señorita said of our *capellan's* rooms—that they were fit only for a poet or a saint?" asked Don Armando, turning towards Dorothea. "One might say the same of this place— that it is the home for a poet or a saint—is it not so?"

"Or for an artist," said she dreamily. "It is such a paradise of colour—colour so divine, ethereal, unearthly —that one wants to coin new words to express it."

"And probably your artist would feel that he needed new pigments to paint it," said Margaret Langdon. "But listen! Don Rafael is telling papa such interesting things of the early times of the country!"

The light conversation at once died away, and they gathered in attentive silence around Don Rafael, who, sitting in the shadow of the old church, talked of the days and scenes which it suggested. Most charming are the stories still told in Mexico, passed from the lips of one generation to another, of those early days, abounding in tenderness and simplicity, filled with poetry and the unpretending record of heroic deeds. Every district has its own traditions, its own beloved, saintly figures, whose influence after the lapse of centuries is still a living force, like that of the great Bishop of Michoacán who wrought such an enduring work, and proved good for once stronger than evil, when he wiped from the recollection of the people the cruelties of Nuño de Guzman by his own surpassing love and justice. As Don Rafael drew these stories, one after the other, from his memory, the present sank into insignificance beside the spell of the past, and more than one of his audience looked across the sunlit water as if expecting to see the brown-robed sons of St. Francis push off in their skiff from the colour-steeped shore and come towards them, or glanced around at the depths of sylvan greenness and shadow for the forms of the ancient worshippers in this wave-encircled sanctuary.

Castle of Chapultepec, City of Mexico

"There is one thing which we must not forget to visit before we leave the island," said Don Armando, "and that is the cave where it is said the padres were sometimes concealed by the friendly natives from hostile incursions."

"A cave!" cried Dorothea. "That always sounds mysterious. Let us by no means fail to see it."

And so after luncheon, having looked their last on the beautiful hill-top and its glorious view, they went down to the side of the island opposite to that on which they had landed, where they found a wild and romantic bit of scenery. Above a narrow strip of smooth, white beach rose cliffs of limestone, with a luxuriant growth of trees, shrubs, and vines, forming a mass of verdure through which the escarpments of the rock rose sheer and bold with striking effect. On the outer edge of the sand upon which they walked the gentle waves of the lake plashed caressingly, and stretched away, a dazzling surface, far as the eye could reach. The divine beauty of the perfect day was all around them, and between the wall of towering cliffs and the shimmering sea of apparently limitless water, they felt themselves as much alone with virgin Nature as if on a desert island.

"The print of a footstep might startle one here as much as it startled Robinson Crusoe," said Russell to Mrs. Langdon, while their guide suddenly paused, parted a thick curtain of vines falling over the face of the cliff under which they stood, and disclosed an opening into which he disappeared. The others paused for a moment, doubtful whether or not to follow, and Miss Graham was heard to murmur apprehensively something about snakes. But Philip and Don Armando, drawing aside the vines more fully, stepped within and called the rest to come.

"Have no fear!" said Don Armando, addressing Dorothea. "It is a very good place indeed."

"Let us see what is our friend's idea of a good place," remarked Travers, offering his hand to lead her into the yawning space, which looked dark and gloomy enough to cause some hesitation.

But all impression of gloom vanished when they stood inside, and found themselves within a spacious chamber, hollowed by Nature out of the heart of the rock, where instead of darkness was a soft, subdued light, pervaded with tremulous, gleaming reflections from the waves beyond, most pleasing to the eye after the glare of sunshine on the white beach. The roof, lofty in front, descended at the back until it became too low for a man to stand upright beneath; the floor was covered with the same fine white sand as that of the beach; and the arch of entrance, with its drapery of green, framed the most exquisite picture conceivable of glittering water, sapphire sky, and distant, misty shores.

"It is a ravishing spot!" Dorothea cried, with her usual enthusiasm. "A fairy grotto—such as the lotos-eaters might have found or dreamed of!"

"I fear we shall all become lotos-eaters in spirit if we remain much longer in these enchanting scenes," said her sister.

“I feel as if we had wandered into another world altogether; as if the world we left behind lay far beneath our feet—"

"As it does in fact," observed Travers. "While we are in a wonderland of atmosphere and beauty, a true land of the sky and the sun, where all things are possible—even to the renewing of one's youth."

A shade of unconscious pathos, in her voice as she uttered the last words, made Russell glance at her, to see a soft light of pleasure, and as it were indeed of reawakening youth, filling her eyes as they gazed at the lovely vision of lake and sky and magic shores beyond the vine-draped entrance of the cave.

"For my part," said Philip, "I can only think what a capital retreat this would be for a pirate. No doubt some dashing Aztec robber made it his home in days gone by."

"And here is his couch still remaining," said Travers, walking towards the farther end of the cavern where a pile of dried grass and leaves had evidently served for the purpose of a bed.

"It is very probable that belated fishermen on the lake might stop and rest here for the night," said Don Armando. "But robbers, no—there are none left in this part of the country."

"I am thinking, however, of the time when there were many of them," said Philip. “Not to speak of the old Aztec days, of which we know very little, but which we may fairly suppose to have been not unlike other pages of human history in observing

' . . . The simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can'—

there have been later days when the same rule was in full force in Mexico. In those days such a hiding-place as this would not be overlooked."

"I am perfectly certain," said Dorothea with conviction, "that this lake, this island, this cave, must have been the scene of unnumbered romances and probably tragedies. That we do not happen to know of them is a mere detail. One's imagination can supply the lack of positive

knowledge. Why, they fairly throng upon one—the memories and figures of those past days! And everything in Mexico was picturesque—everything! That is what makes the country so inexpressibly fascinating. It is fairly steeped in colour. It is not only what one sees, but what one feels—the spell, the glamour of the past—that is so alluring," the eager enthusiast went on. "Conquistadores, Aztec chieftains, saintly Franciscans—one sees them all moving through these beautiful scenes, and adding the touch of romance to their natural beauty. So why should we question the exactness of one story or another? We may be sure that more stories than we can dream of have been enacted not only here but in every quarter of this old land."

"Old, yes," said Russell—"so old, as its mighty ruins tell, that the story of its conquest by the Spaniards is but a tale of yesterday."

"Well," said Philip obstinately, "what is to prevent my robber chieftain from figuring in some of those primitive times? I contend that he is a perfectly possible tenant of this place."

"Give him his robber chieftain!" said Dorothea magnanimously. "No doubt there were numbers of robbers during those ages, and why might not some one of them have made his retreat here?"

“I wonder if he left any of his treasure behind?" observed Travers musingly. “It might repay one, perhaps, to explore."

"It is doubtful," said Don Rafael in a literal tone. “There are many tales of concealed treasure told in this country, but few of them have any foundation. Now permit me to say that it is not well to remain here too long, after coming out of the warm sunshine. We are likely to take cold."

With true Mexican dread of anything like a sudden chill from change of temperature, he led the way back into the outer world. Most of the party followed with alacrity, but one or two lingered yet a little longer in the wild and charming spot.

"It seems to me," said Dorothea, “that the story of life is that one is always being called away from pleasant things. It is a curious fact that nothing—either human voice or imperative duty—ever calls one away from disagreeable things."

"And the pleasant things are so few," added Travers, "that one might think for very pity Fate would spare us interruption. For—

' . . . What is it that will last?
All things are taken from us, and become
Portions and parcels of the dreadful past '—

as this day will soon, or we may say has already, become."

“But we can remember it," said Dorothea, as they walked along the shining beach. "And that is a great thing. I do not think I shall ever see a day so dark and dreary that I cannot brighten it by recalling the divine beauty of this scene—these leagues of opalescent water, those shores swimming in light, the ineffable radiance of this sky, the heavenly tints upon those distant hills, and this green island of Paradise."

Her companion looked at her with a smile. “You are indeed to be envied," he said, "because you appreciate so keenly and enjoy so intensely. Walk a little way through life with one who can do neither, and you will learn your own good fortune."

"Do you think any one could be so dull as to fail to appreciate all this?" she asked, glancing around comprehensively. "I shall always feel that we have spent a day in primitive Mexico, and know just what met the eyes of the conquistadores as they marched through its virgin scenes."

"Yes," he assented, "for I am sure that in this secluded region life has changed no whit in its outward aspect since those days."

And this impression was if possible deepened a little later when they rested for a brief space while their boats were being made ready, under the deep shade of spreading trees, in the clean-swept space before the doors of the lowly dwellings, where seats were placed for them with an exquisite courtesy, and water offered in the earthen vessels of the country, such vessels as the Aztecs fashioned before the Spaniard ever landed on the soil of the New World. Children with skins of bronze and dark eyes shaded by long, silken lashes, brought for inspection and possible purchase the relics of the earlier time with which the island was strewn, fragments of ancient pottery, arrows and spear-heads of obsidian. Truly but little outward change had taken place in the lives of these gentle people since the first padres landed where the waves were now plashing so softly on the beach, and climbed the green height beyond to plant their cross.

As Dorothea had said, no one could be so dull as to miss the charm of these scenes, and there was not one of the party of strangers who did not feel a thrill of regret as they were rowed back over the shining water, and drove homeward across the wide plains, where the breeze of twilight blew sweetly and freshly from the violet hills, at the thought that such idyllic days were ended.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XV.

AN EMBASSY OF CUPID.

BUT besides this pleasant regret at leaving the hacienda, there was regret of another and keener kind for the Meynells, in the fact that departure meant also separation from Philip. The leave of that debonair young gentleman had expired, and it was necessary for him to return to his engineering duties in the neighbourhood of Colima.

There was, however, a surprise in store, primarily for the general, and afterward for all the family, before the final adieus either to him or their hosts were said. On the night of their return from the lake excursion, Philip surprised his father by requesting a private interview, and when they were safely secluded in the general's apartment further surprised him by requesting that he would go to Don Rafael and ask the hand of Doña Mercedes.

"You know that is the custom here," pursued the young man calmly, before his astonished parent could make either comment or objection. "An ambassador must be sent to ask a young lady in marriage, and there can be no doubt that you are the proper ambassador on the present occasion. No one else could so well make the proposal and answer any objection that Don Rafael may offer."

"I admire your coolness in taking my consent so entirely for granted," said the general, finding words at last. “Has it not occurred to you that I may have some objection to such a marriage?"

“Why, no." replied Philip in surprise. “What objection could you possibly have? I arranged this visit in order that you might see for yourself what sort of people the De Vargas are, and you must admit that objection to them is out of the question."

“To them personally, yes," said the general. “But I object to marriages with foreigners. They are always ill-advised."

“That is merely a matter of opinion," returned his son; "and you will pardon me if I say of such provincial and narrow opinion that I do not really think you can seriously entertain it. I am the person concerned in the matter, and you certainly could not be so unreasonable as to refuse your countenance to my marriage with a beautiful and charming girl of high family, merely because she happens to be a foreigner."

The general felt that this was true. He could not prove himself, as Philip had implied, so narrow-minded and provincial—and reasonable objection to Doña Mercedes there was none. Indeed, it was only a remembrance of the fear that had been in his mind when he started for Mexico which induced him to make even so faint a protest. It seemed a point of honour with himself to maintain his consistency by doing so much; but in fact all his prejudices had been thoroughly dispelled, and in his heart he was prepared to admit that such a marriage was all, and perhaps more than all, that even his partial family could ask for Philip.

“I presume," he said after a moment's pause, "that even if I did refuse what you politely call my countenance to the matter, you would not feel bound to consider my objections."

“I decline to take such a contingency into consideration," Philip replied. “You are too kind and too reasonable for me to do so. Honestly, father, you must acknowledge that the man who is lucky enough to win Mercedes de Vargas is to be congratulated on a good fortune so far beyond his merits that objection cannot even be mentioned in such a connection."

The young man's face flushed with the ardour of his feelings, and although the light of a single candle is not a very good illumination by means of which to read such signs, the general's eyes perceived them and the general's heart softened to such an extent that to keep up even a feint of opposition longer was impossible.

“My dear boy," he said warmly, "you are right. Objection in this case is out of the question. Only, Phil—only, I fear such a marriage will separate you from us."

“Why should you fear that?" asked his son. "Don Rafael might, and probably will, express such an apprehension about his daughter, since the wife follows the husband, not the husband the wife, but I see no cause for it from you."

“Then you would not think of making your home in Mexico?"

"By no means. I like the country and many of its people more than I can say; but I should never think of making my home here in any enduring sense."

“I am glad to hear that," said the general with an air of relief. “But we are talking as if the affair rested only with us to arrange. I presume that you have had an understanding with Doña Mercedes?"

Phil nodded. “Be sure of that, sir. I don't go upon uncertainties. One has not many opportunities in Mexico to speak to a girl alone—but I have managed to find or to make such

opportunities once or twice lately, and to-day I learned all I wanted to know. But the consent of the parents is now to be sought, and that must be done in the most formal manner. As I have said, you are the proper person to approach Don Rafael on my behalf, and remember that the alliance is to be proposed as if you were an ambassador of the middle ages soliciting the hand of a princess."

“Nonsense!” said the general. “We are not in the middle ages, we are in the nineteenth century, and I shall go to Don Rafael —though, according to my ideas it would be much better if you went yourself—and say to him, as one sensible man to another "

“Hold!" cried Philip laughing. “If you are not going to do this thing in the proper manner, it will be better not to attempt it at all. Don Rafael is tolerant and modern up to a certain point, but in all that touches his pride he is as tenacious as a Spanish hidalgo. To approach him on a matter so important as the marriage of his daughter without observing all the forms of respect in use in the country—and observed, I assure you, even among the lowly—would be an unpardonable offence."

"But how the deuce," said the general, "am I to know these forms? I was not brought up in Mexico!"

Philip reflected for a moment, and then said slowly in a tone of consideration: “It would never do for you to leave here without speaking on my behalf. Don Rafael would have cause to think that you disapprove of the marriage, and that would put his pride in arms so that I should be undoubtedly dismissed. But we can't afford to omit any of the necessary ceremonial. A respect which the daughter of a grocer expects, we must not fail to pay to the daughter of one of the oldest houses in Mexico. Ah, I have an idea!—Russell shall accompany you. He knows the usages of the country, and will understand just what to say. I'll go for him."

The speaker sprang to his feet and dashed from the room, leaving the general to meditate on the unexpected turn which events had taken. After a moment that sense of the absurdity of the situation, which had already struck Mrs. Langdon and Travers, began to dawn upon him. A smile broadened his countenance. “By Jove!” he muttered half aloud, “it looks as if I had come to Mexico simply to make Phil's proposal of marriage for him! What will Margaret and Dorothea say? This is rather different from what we anticipated."

Only a few minutes elapsed before Philip returned with Russell, whom he had unceremoniously withdrawn from the social circle. “Here’s the man for the occasion," he cried as he re-entered. "Sit down, Russell, and take a cigar. Now attention! What do you think of asking the hand of a young lady in marriage?"

"I think," replied Russell calmly, "that I should like to know, in the first place, who the young lady is; and secondly, why I should ask her hand in marriage?"

"Why should you ask it? For me, my dear fellow, for me!" cried Phil, slapping him on the shoulder in the exhilaration of his spirits. “And as for who she is—who should she be but the most beautiful and most fascinating girl in Mexico, the Señorita Dona Maria de las Mercedes de Vargas y Medina!"

"Hum!" said Russell. "So that was the meaning of the *tête-à-tête* I was so unfortunate as to interrupt on the island to-day!"

"Frankly," replied Phil, "had you appeared a moment sooner around the wall of that old church, I should have thrown a champagne-bottle at your head, for one's opportunities of *tête-à-*

tête are most preciously few in this delightful country, and to be prized accordingly. But all was settled when you made your appearance, so I forgave you. Now, the question is, will you kindly lend your countenance and support to my father when he goes to make my proposal in due form to Don Rafael?"

"With pleasure, if the general desires me to do so," replied Russell.

"I shall be exceedingly obliged," said the general, "for really I have very little idea what to say in the premises, never having been an ambassador of the kind before. My other sons did not expect me to make their proposals for them," he added in a tone which implied that he much preferred a method calculated to give less trouble to the parent.

"Your other sons were not seeking their brides in Mexico," said Philip. “Had they been doing so, they would certainly have been obliged to observe the customs of the country, as every man who wishes to succeed here, whether in love or in business, must."

Russell nodded assent. “You are right," he said. “The man who does not adapt and conform himself to the social usages and standards of politeness in the country which he enters as a foreigner, is predestined to failure therein. And especially would it very much misbecome a man to fail on these points in a matter at once so delicate and so important as the negotiations of a marriage."

"Said I not truly that you were the man for the occasion?” cried Philip gaily. "Neither your apprehension nor your knowledge is ever at fault. Go, then, with my father at once, and in due state convey to Don Rafael and Doña Herminia my request for the hand of their daughter. I will await the result of your embassy here."

The general looked slightly apprehensive as he turned to Russell. "I shall expect you to be spokesman," he said. "Have you ever had any experience in this sort of business before?"

"Once," replied Russell, “I was staying for several weeks in a remote country village in the State of Oaxaca, exploring some ruins in the neighbourhood, and while there I became great friends with the *cura*, a most admirable man of saintly character and cultivated mind. One day, to my great surprise, he said to me, 'I go to ask the hand of a young lady in marriage. Will you come with me?’ ‘You go to ask the hand of a young lady in marriage!' said I. ' When has the law of celibacy for the clergy been relaxed?' 'You are a jester, my friend,' he replied, smiling in mild reproof. 'I go to ask the young lady for Don Salvador Jimenez, a most excellent man. Are you not aware that the *cura* is the ambassador commonly chosen in these cases? I have asked many, many young ladies in marriage.' I had learned before this that the *cura* was the adviser of the people in all their business and domestic affairs, but that he had also to arrange their marriages I had not known. I suggested that the position carried with it much responsibility. But he replied that it was not so. ‘An ambassador merely conveys the proposals of the suitor to the parents,' he said. ‘I place the matter before them and they decide. Sometimes they ask my advice in making their decision, but not on the occasion when I have conveyed the proposal.' Well, to cut the story short, I accompanied him, heard the proposal made, and the alliance of the worthy Don Salvador declined with every expression of courtesy and esteem. This was my sole experience as a matrimonial ambassador."

“Well," said Philip, " you are at least equipped with some degree of experience, and we will hope that better success may attend your proposals for me than those for the disappointed Don Salvador. But while you and my father talk you forget my impatience. Go, go!"

The two ambassadors thus sent forth, paused a moment in the corridor outside—lighted partly by the soft starlight which filled the open court, and partly by lamps suspended at intervals along the arcades—to arrange their plan of action. From the farther side of the patio came the sound of voices and soft bursts of laughter, showing that the party of young people were as usual assembled on one of the corridors.

"We will go to the *sala*," said Russell, "sending meanwhile a servant to request that Don Rafael will do us the honour to attend upon us there."

“And remember," said the general nervously, after a clapping of hands had brought a servant who was despatched with the message, and they were taking their way towards the *sala*, the great open doors of which fronted them, "that you are to do the talking. And in order to be more ceremonious—especially if Doña Herminia comes—you had better speak in Spanish. Tell them that Phil's prospects are very good. He's doing well in his profession, and will of course inherit some fortune from me, though it will be difficult to go into exact particulars on that point."

"Those details will have to be discussed later," said Russell. "It is not likely we shall receive a definite answer tonight—unless, indeed, it be a refusal carefully wrapped in courteous phrases."

"I hope not," said the general hastily. "It would be a hard blow to Phil." And then he laughed. “See here, Russell," he added, "have you any idea of the absurdity of the errand on which I am bound, in view of the fact that the chief object we had in view in coming to Mexico was to prevent Phil's marrying a Mexican? I even remember now that Dorothea insisted upon bringing Violet Graham with us for this purpose—Phil, you see, had been in love with her after a fashion, and it was thought she might prove a counter-attraction against the unknown Mexican girl. Ha, ha!—I shall have a good laugh at Dorothea."

"It strikes me," said Russell, "that since you are the active agent in upsetting your own plans, the laugh will rather be with Mademoiselle Dorothea."

"I think," said the general, who had, as will be perceived, arrived at the same point of view as Dorothea herself in the affair, "that the laugh is against all of us. But here we are—and I confess to you that I feel as nervous as if I were going to make a proposal for myself."

To the two ambassadors entered after a moment Don Rafael. Divining that such a summons meant something of a formal nature, he insisted ceremoniously upon leading them to a sofa at the head of the room, and, having seated himself in one of the large chairs beside it, waited their communication.

Most thankful was the general then for Russell's aid and support, while Russell smiling to himself as he repeated, as far as his memory served him, the formula employed by the *cura* of the village in Oaxaca, set forth in high-sounding Spanish that his friend General Meynell had the honour to ask of Don Rafael the hand in marriage of his daughter, Doña Mercedes, for his son the Señor Don Felipe Meynell, with whom Don Rafael was well acquainted, and who had conceived a strong attachment for the young lady.

To this Don Rafael, with a fine courtesy replying in English so as to be intelligible to the general, replied that he felt the proposal a great honour to himself and his family, and that while nothing could give him more pleasure than such an alliance with people so distinguished as his American friends, and for whom he entertained such high sentiments of respect and esteem, he

must ask for time to consider a matter so important as the marriage of his daughter, especially when the suitor proposed was a foreigner, which would imply separation from her family and alienation from her country.

The general then, speaking for himself, and with a dignity which sat well upon him, assured Don Rafael that he was not surprised that this consideration should have weight in his decision, but begged him to remember the facility of intercourse between the two countries, and the fact that Philip would probably make his home for a considerable time at least in Mexico. "And finally," he said, "it is surely to be considered that if you do my son the honour of accepting him, your daughter will not enter a family of strangers, but of those who have already learned to admire and love her, and who will welcome her warmly to a new home, which need imply no loss of affection for the old. Who indeed," added the speaker with evident sincerity, "could forget such a home as you have showed us here?"

Don Rafael bowed his head in stately acknowledgment. "You are most kind, señor," he answered, "and I shall not forget to consider that all you have mentioned in this connection. But there are many things besides to be considered, and it is not our custom that the father alone should decide these questions. The mother has an equal voice in the destiny of her daughter."

"You will pardon us," said Russell, "that we did not request the presence of Doña Herminia. We left that for you to do if you thought best on learning our errand."

Don Rafael waved his hand. "She will understand, and I shall consult with her," he said. "It is the same."

"And when," inquired the general, "can my son hope for his answer? He is naturally very anxious, and trusts that you will permit him to explain his entire position to you."

"I will speak to Don Felipe to-morrow morning," replied Don Rafael, "and will then fix the time at which our final decision can be given. Meanwhile, señor general, you must again allow me to thank you for the honour you have done my daughter and myself, and to assure you that your son's proposal has gained much by being presented with the distinguished approval of yourself."

"But all the same," observed the general ruefully, as, after properly acknowledging these complimentary expressions by others equally so, they had taken leave of Don Rafael, who accompanied them bowing to the door of the *sala*, and were retracing their steps along the corridor, "we haven't much comfort to carry to Phil. When you sift all these fine speeches there is not a single definite assurance in them. Why couldn't the man say yes or no at once— or at least promise to give us his decision to-morrow morning? But, by Jove! to-morrow morning, Phil is only to hear—how long he must wait for his answer."

"Phil will not be surprised," said Russell. "He knows Mexico well enough to be aware that no decision is ever given quickly here."

Phil justified this opinion by evincing no surprise at all at the report of his ambassadors. "Wait!—of course I expected to wait," he said cheerfully. "In this Land of Mañana who expects anything else? But the first step is taken; and if I can satisfy Don Rafael to-morrow about my worldly prospects he will slowly proceed to take the second, which is much family consultation and powwow, and after a few weeks I shall duly and solemnly be informed whether I am accepted or rejected. Happily that point is settled as far as Doña Mercedes is concerned—so I

can wait the result with something of patience, secure in the fact that I have strong advocates in the family council."

It may readily be imagined that the surprise of Mrs. Langdon and Dorothea was great when they were informed that their father had positively gone to Don Rafael to ask the hand of Mercedes for Philip. They looked at each other for a moment in silence, and then simultaneously burst into laughter.

“It is too ridiculous," cried Dorothea, finding voice at last, "that he should have given all the aid in his power to accomplish the very thing we came here to prevent. But he need not have been ashamed to tell us, Mr. Russell "—the general had made Russell the bearer of the tidings—" for I am glad he had the courage to be so inconsistent. It requires sometimes a great deal of courage to be inconsistent, to retreat promptly from a mistaken position," the young lady pursued, and then, as if to prove that she herself possessed this courage, she added boldly : " I am delighted that Phil is really going to marry this lovely Mercedes. Did Don Rafael give his consent? "

“On the contrary, Don Rafael, although most complimentary, was thoroughly non-committal," Russell replied ; " and, although Phil is sanguine, I do not myself think that his consent is at all to be reckoned on as a certainty. It is very natural that he should prefer his daughter to marry one of her own people."

"But if *she* does not prefer it?”

"As to that, very Old World ideas prevail here, and a daughter seldom rebels against the decision of her parents with regard to her marriage."

"I think Mercedes will have a voice in her own marriage," said Dorothea. “In point of fact I am sure of it. She has a very strong will and has plainly been indulged until it will not be easy to oppose her now."

"Well," said Russell. “Phil is to have an interview with Don Rafael to-morrow morning, after which he must leave the house and not reappear until the answer to his suit is transmitted to him."

"And do our plans for leaving to-morrow hold good?" asked Mrs. Langdon.

“Oh, yes. There is nothing to detain us. And I suppose you know that Don Rodolfo is to accompany us to the City of Mexico."

"So I have heard," Margaret replied, with a glance towards Dorothea, whose countenance at those words assumed an expression of lofty disgust. "Do you suppose that his evident admiration of Violet has any serious result in view?"

"*Quién sabe*?" replied Russell, smiling, and lightly lifting his shoulders.

But, whether with serious intent or not, there could at least be no doubt of Don Rodolfo's admiration of the American beauty. That had been apparent from the first, as had also been, to those who knew her well, Miss Graham's encouragement of his attentions, although this encouragement was given with due regard to a very refined code of social manners. Anything like vulgar flirtation—the flirtation of the ordinary, uncultured American girl —was unknown to this young lady, accomplished in finer and also more dangerous arts of conquest. No one except her victim could ever say when or how Violet Graham wove her spells, so quietly and in such subtle fashion was the work achieved, but the result was always the same. The victim, for a time

at least, forgot all other women to follow in the train of one who to reputed coldness of heart added a studied propriety of conduct that defied the most rigorous scrutiny of Mrs. Grundy. Don Rodolfo, who in his residence abroad had met some American young ladies of a different type, was emphatic in his expressions of enthusiastic admiration to Philip.

"The ladies of your family are most charming," he remarked on one occasion to that somewhat unresponsive young gentleman. "Most distinguished and full of—what one might call high-bred simplicity. But, without making any comparison, you will permit me to say that Miss Graham is of the very highest type of elegance. I speak not of her beauty, which is extraordinary; but her manner, her bearing, her perfect knowledge of *les convenances* are worthy of a *grande dame*."

"Yes," Philip assented gravely, "I think Nature has fitted her up for something of that kind. And a *grande dame* she will certainly be if it rests with her to become so."

“Naturally," said Don Rodolfo. “If she were to become anything else, it would be a waste of the finest natural capabilities."

"I beg your pardon," interposed Travers, who made one of the group, and who could not suffer such assertions to pass unchallenged, "but Miss Graham, with all her beauty, her good manners, and her knowledge of *les convenances*, has not the capabilities to make a *grande dame*. A successful woman of the world, a leader of society and fashion—yes. But a true *grande dame*—no. That is something finer and higher than she can ever attain to."

"Perhaps you are right," said Don Rodolfo musingly. "For myself I prefer the type to which you allude. It is less severe than that of the true *grande dame*—and more seductive. To be thoroughly captivating a woman should be *un peu coquette*, though she should never violate a social rule in her coquetry."

"If that is your ideal," Travers remarked drily, "there can be no doubt that Miss Graham fulfils it perfectly."

After this no one was surprised when Don Rodolfo announced that, since his affairs called him to the capital, he would have the great pleasure of travelling thither in the company of his American friends. "And it may be that I can render your stay in the city a little pleasanter," he added modestly. "I am not such a guide to things artistic and antique as your Mr. Russell, but I can perhaps show you something of the social side of life in Mexico."

"Which I am sure will be much more interesting," said Miss Graham with an upward glance of her violet eyes.

Philip's interview with Don Rafael having taken place the next morning, and his worldly prospects having been fully set forth by himself and his father to that gentleman, he was informed that Don Rafael and Doña Herminia—who was present at this interview—would take his suit into favourable consideration, and would give him their decisive answer at their residence in the city of Mexico, to which they would remove a month hence.

The young man was himself too well aware of the national habits and the etiquette prescribed for such negotiations to remonstrate against this delay; but he found it difficult to prevent his father from doing so.

"Come, come," said the general to Don Rafael, "can we not settle this matter a little sooner, and not condemn the young people to a month of suspense?"

"My father thinks and speaks according to the customs of our country, señor," said Philip hastily, giving his father the while an unfilial kick. "I am content to leave my pretensions in your hands, sure that you will give them the most favourable consideration, and to await your decision until the time you have specified, when I shall have the honour of attending upon you in the city of Mexico."

"That is settled, then," said Don Rafael, bowing; after which, relaxing somewhat from his hidalgo manner, he turned smiling to the general. "It is, then, the fashion in your country, señor general," he said, "to arrange your marriages with as much haste as your business transactions? But in a matter so important we think it best to take a little time."

"Evidently," replied the general, unable to restrain a slight note of sarcasm in his tone. "But if my son is satisfied, why so, of course, am I."

An hour later the American party had taken leave—Philip's farewell to Doña Mercedes consisting in bowing low over her hand as she stood by her mother's side—and were once more *en route* towards the brilliant city that lies beside its lakes in that high valley where the wandering Aztecs halted in their triumphant march and founded their capital long centuries ago.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HILL OF THE BELLS.

IT had been for some time a matter of discussion whether or not the party should pause at Querétaro. The general inclined to the opinion that it would be well to see a spot of so much historical interest, Dorothea opposed a halt on account of the tragical associations of the place, and the rest were more or less indifferent. Only Miss Graham was moved to express a certain degree of surprise at Dorothea's vehemence.

"It was very sad, of course, about Maximilian and poor Carlotta," she temperately remarked, "but I do not see that we can help them now by staying away from Querétaro."

"It is not a question of helping any one, but of sparing ourselves," replied Dorothea. "I don't know what others may feel, but I do not wish to have my sympathies so painfully wrought upon as they would be in a place where the whole dreadful tragedy of betrayal, mock trial, and murder took place."

"But," objected Mrs. Langdon, "Querétaro is an old city, and must possess a great deal of interest apart from the events of which you speak."

"Whatever else it may possess of interest in its past or in its present, you could not escape from the memory of that latest and darkest chapter of history which took place there," said Dorothea with conviction. "At least I am sure I could not. But, of course, if papa really wishes to stop, I have no more to say."

"There is such a thing as encouraging sympathy and imagination to a morbid degree," observed the general with an air of reproof. "It strikes me that we might afterwards regret not

having stopped at a place of such interesting historical associations should we fail to do so. What do you say, Russell?"

"Like Mrs. Langdon," replied Russell, "I must say that Querétaro is a fine old city with many interesting features and a past extending far beyond Maximilian, which you may enjoy visiting if you can manage to banish the shadow of the unfortunate emperor, and not allow your sympathy to become too painfully excited over the details of his unhappy fate."

"As a matter of common sense, why should it be more excited there than elsewhere?" asked the general. "We are already aware of those details, and I should like to know"—with a severe glance at his younger daughter—"how one who does not hold her sympathetic feelings in check can hope to visit any historical scenes with pleasure—since the shadow of tragedy, old as time, is over them all."

"I don't pretend to be reasonable," said Dorothea, "but some tragedies have always affected me more than others; and this piteous story of Querétaro is one of them. We won't discuss the matter further, however—only, when we reach Querétaro, let no one propose my going to any of the spots peculiarly associated with the tragical events that took place there."

To escape the memory of these events is, however, impossible in Querétaro. Fair lies the beautiful old city on its smiling plain, encircled by distant mountains, its domes and towers rising above the embowering verdure of gardens and *alameda*; but who that looks on it can forget the story of treachery and cruelty written in letters of blood across its fairness, or banish the recollection of the unfortunate emperor who fell under the bullets of a savage soldiery on that lonely and desolate Cerro de las Campanas which lifts its barren slope towards heaven in perpetual memorial of the noble blood shed upon it?

Certainly the party that now halted there were not, with one or two exceptions, formed of material to resist or ignore the haunting associations of the place. It was not Dorothea alone whom the mournful shade of the murdered emperor pursued. In the statue-adorned plaza, with its palms and bananas, they saw him in imagination, taking his evening walk, as was his custom during the siege, or sitting with the dark shadow of coming fate upon him, on the stone rim of its fountain. What dreams of his distant home, of the safety and peace of beautiful Miramar, its marble steps washed by the waves of the Adriatic, must have come to him, as he sat in the Mexican twilight, with the shells of the besiegers striking around him; what thoughts of his devoted and distracted wife, gone then on her last, unavailing effort to save him; what bitter memories of the faithless ally, whose abject cowardice had left him only the alternative of dishonour or death! Nor was it possible to pass through the streets of the city without meeting at every turn the same dominating memory. In the theatre sat the court-martial that executed the orders of Juarez by condemning him to death, and in the Convent of the Capuchinas—now, of course, a barrack!—is the cell where he was imprisoned, and whence he went forth in the early radiance of a Mexican morning to meet his death on the sad, grey Hill of the Bells.

"There were many who thought of that hill at the downfall of Napoleon, whose desertion sent him to his death," remarked Travers as they sat in the plaza in the soft, perfumed evening air and discussed the tragedy which it seemed impossible to avoid.

"He should have been wise enough to leave the country when the French troops were withdrawn," said the general with decision.

"Had he been a coward he would have done so," answered Don Rodolfo. "But he conceived that it would be an act of treachery, or at least of baseness, on his part to abandon those who had chosen him as their leader. It proved an unwise decision, for the end could have been no worse for them had he gone, but we must admire the heroism which made such a decision possible."

"Yes," responded Russell. "It makes one forget, or at least pardon, the weakness of policy which alienated those who might have been powerful friends, by a hopeless endeavour to conciliate irreconcilable enemies."

"His policy in that respect was certainly weak," said the young Mexican, "but his intentions were excellent, and Mexico's best hope for a good government perished with him."

"I have never understood," observed Travers reflectively, "how a man of the character of Maximilian could possibly have been induced to the false step of issuing that 'black decree' under which several Liberal generals were shot, and which was made the pretext for his own execution."

La Viga Canal

"It was due to Bazaine, who was the emperor's evil genius from first to last," said Don Rodolfo. “But for the influence of that man— whose treachery in France surprised no one in Mexico—the story of the last desperate attempt to found in our country something better than the military despotism which crushes all individual freedom now as then, might have had a different ending. But it is a painful subject, especially for those who suffered much from adherence to the party that brought Maximilian to the country and followed him to his death."

"Painful!—I should think so!" said Dorothea in a tone of mournful exasperation, as she regarded, amid foliage and glancing lights, that haunted fountain-rim where the proud, martial form had so often sat. “And yet we will talk of it! Mr. Russell, cannot you come to the rescue?

Tell us, do tell us something to draw attention away from this pursuing subject. Is there no legend, tradition, story, connected with Querétaro but the tragedy in which perished not only three men but the hopes of half a nation?"

"Oh, yes," Russell replied to this appeal. "Querétaro possesses many such stories—notably the very charming legend of its foundation."

"Tell it to us. Take us as far away as possible from these later times."

"Come, then, in imagination to the days immediately following the Conquest. At that time there was a certain Otomite chief, Fernando de Tapia, who being a most zealous convert to Christianity, desired to Christianise all the other members of his tribe, and obtained permission to set forth to do so. Having therefore recruited an army, and taking with him certain godly priests to baptize such of the heathen as he might succeed in converting, he went forth from his native town of Xilotepec, which is near Tula, and marched across the mountains to this place, where even then was situated an Otomite town. Here halting with his army, he invited a conference with the inhabitants and arranged with them that champions presented by him and champions selected by them should fight together, ' but only with their fists and feet that blood might not be shed,' and that should his champions win, the people of the town should agree to renounce their false gods and receive Christian instruction."

"He had the spirit of a crusader, that man, if he was an Indian chief," observed the general.

"Whereupon the champions fought on this very plain which lies around us now, in full sight of the army and the people from the town; and we are told that while they fought all the multitude shouted and beat drums and shot arrows into the air. 'And,' say the old chronicles, 'while the fighting continued, the light of the sun was lessened, and floating in the air above the combatants, plainly seen by all, was the blessed Santiago, and beside him a great ruddy cross.' Awed and amazed by this prodigy, the people of Querétaro withdrew their champions, acknowledged themselves vanquished, and begged to be instructed and baptized. This wonder having occurred on the Feast of Santiago, the Christian town then founded was called Santiago de Querétaro, which is its name unto this day."

"A very creditable foundation," said Travers approvingly. "What would not one give for a little of the childlike faith which brought heaven so near to earth in those days! Methinks the men of our day might fight long before they would see the blessed Santiago appear above them in the heavens."

"The men of our day would not be in the least likely to fight for any cause in which the blessed Santiago could take interest enough to appear," said Dorothea caustically.

"Do you know," asked Don Rodolfo, turning to her, "the name of that roadway yonder in the heavens?"

"Why, certainly," she answered, following his gesture with her glance. "That is the Milky Way."

"The Milky Way!" he repeated. "It is that which you call it? But our name is very different. It is for us El Camino de Santo Santiago."

"'The road of the holy St. James,'" she translated, seizing the suggestion at once. "The road by which he came down from heaven to aid the Christian knights in their battles against the infidel Moors! How beautifully Spanish fancy has united the poetry of its ardent faith with every natural object! I shall never forget that name, and I shall never look at the Milky Way again

without fancying that I see the shining armour of the saint, as he rode down to give help and courage to those whose battle-cry was, 'St. James for Spain!'"

"Meanwhile," said Russell in an injured tone, "I have not finished my story of the founding of Querétaro. Upon the spot where the champions had fought, the converted Indians begged that there might be set up a stone cross in the semblance of that which had appeared to them in the heavens. This was accordingly done, and about the cross was afterwards built a chapel. This chapel—known as the Church of Santa Cruz—has in the course of three and a half centuries been more than once rebuilt; but the ancient cross is there still, and we will go and see it to-morrow."

On the morrow they went. And in this unique and interesting sanctuary, face to face as it were with the remote past, beholding that ancient and venerable cross carved and set up by the first converts, it was easy, for a time at least, to forget all save those early days so full of romantic contrast and picturesque charm, so lighted by the passionate faith which alone can see marvels and work wonders, and so dignified by noble generosity alike to God and man.

"And now," said Russell when they came forth from Santa Cruz, "you must see another notable old church, also closely connected with the primitive era—Santa Clara. It is not only very ancient and very picturesque, but it has a history which will interest you. For this church and the convent once adjoining it were founded by the son of the crusader-like chief, Fernando de Tapia. He was, we are told, very wealthy, the Cacique Diego de Tapia, and, being also very pious, founded the convent for his daughter, who became its first novice. He was also the founder of the Church and Hospital of the *Purísima Concepción*."

"Wonderful was the charity of men, both Indians and Spaniards, in those days, which are like pages from the ages of faith!" said Margaret Langdon. "The history of every foundation is a poem in itself."

"As a result of their charity," said Russell, "Mexico was covered with institutions for the relief of every need of humanity, before the time when, under the specious name of 'reform,' robbery stalked not only into the sanctuary but into the asylum and hospital as well. But here we are at Santa Clara. "

"Oh," cried Dorothea, as they entered, "this is indeed ancient and picturesque! Let us sit down and take it in."

So they sat down and allowed the exquisite charm of the old sanctuary, with the spell of its story stretching so far back into the past, to sink into their souls. And though they were not inclined to agree wholly with the artist who has placed on record his opinion that Santa Clara is "the most delightfully picturesque church interior one can meet with the world over "*—for it seemed to them that in their wanderings they had seen other old sanctuaries as lovely as this—they were nevertheless delighted with the rich dimness of its faded glories, with the splendour of its ancient churrigueresque altars and doorways, masses of the most elaborate ornamentation carved in cedar and covered with beaten gold, and the harmonious details of beautiful old lamps, deep-toned pictures, and banners which seemed of sufficient antiquity to have led the army of the great-hearted chief who, not content with possessing truth himself, wished that his brethren should share it.

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* F. Hopkinson Smith, "A White Umbrella in Mexico."

“Don Diego de Tapia," murmured Dorothea softly, as she turned for a last glance into the interior of the church as they passed out, "you builded well, and may the God whom you honoured so nobly, keep your memory green in the hearts of those who, like yourself, are of the pure blood of the ancient race, and who owe their existence to-day in the land of their fathers to the faith which you loved and served so truly!"

But in this attractive old city there are other things besides tragical memories and ancient, legend-encrusted sanctuaries. There are streets lined with houses where great portals unclose to give enchanting glimpses of flowery gardens blooming in the Moorish courts, and where dark-eyed beauties smile from carved stone balconies, or behind the iron bars of the windows; there are plazas, adorned with tropical plants and brimming fountains, at every turn; there are shops filled with images of saints carved in wood and coloured in a most lifelike manner—for the statues which adorn every church in Mexico are executed here in Querétaro—and there are other shops where the lovely opals chiefly found in this neighbourhood can be bought in any quantity and at any price desired. Most fascinating are these exquisite stones, and even Dorothea followed for once the example of Violet Graham, and after a morning in the churches gave up an afternoon to the shops. Later, when in the delicious cool of the evening the scattered members of the party reunited in the embowered walks of the *alameda*, there was a general comparison of purchases. Fortunately, each was of the opinion that he or she had been most lucky or most wise in choice; and since the opals were so beautiful that distinction between them was difficult, content rather than envy was the universal result of the comparison.

“I think my stones are much the best," said Miss Graham with an air of complacence, as she folded together the black paper in which they were wrapped. "But then I gave a great deal of time to their selection. I have done nothing else all day. Now you," addressing Dorothea, "made your selections too hastily to have chosen very well."

"I am quite satisfied with my choice," said Dorothea, spreading her piece of black paper on the palm of her hand and admiring the changeful lustre of the gems laid thereon. "I don't see a single stone in the collection of any of you which I covet, except that wonderful opal, with every tint of the rainbow, which Mr. Travers secured."

Mr. Travers put his hand in his pocket, brought forth his wad of black paper, opened it, selected one of the stones within, and held it forth for general contemplation. It was indeed a miracle of beauty, worthy a place among the jewels of a queen. As Dorothea had said, it held in its flashing heart every tint of prismatic colour, its lambent fire wavering and changing with each movement and each point of view.

"I had forgotten that," said Miss Graham regretfully. "Yes, I must confess it is finer than anything I have. I looked in vain for a stone like it."

"I am told that such stones are rare," said Travers. “As you are aware, I did not purchase this in Querétaro. I bought it from a railroad man—a conductor on the train coming here. He professed to be anxious to part with it because he declared that it had brought him ill-luck. Fortunately, I am not superstitious, and I was glad to obtain what is the finest specimen of the fire opal I have ever seen."

“I am sure," said Miss Graham in a feeling tone, "I would willingly brave all possible ill-luck to possess that beautiful stone. You can have any two or three of mine that you prefer, if you will exchange, Mr. Travers."

“You are very kind," answered Travers, bowing and restoring the brilliant gem to its back covering, "but I could not think of depriving you of any of your stones, while for this I have a destined purpose."

" Now, what on earth can a man want with such a jewel?" said Miss Graham in an injured aside to Don Rodolfo. “It is simply and distinctly meanness which makes him refuse to let me have it."

Don Rodolfo did not point out the obvious commercial difference in the exchange proposed; but only assured the disappointed beauty that, had it been his own good fortune to have secured the opal, it would have been laid at her feet without an instant's hesitation or delay.

Meanwhile Travers, having put his opal away in haste, as if fearful that Miss Graham might make further proposals and demands, turned to Dorothea and asked what she was prepared to offer in exchange for it.

"Nothing," she replied concisely. “My stones are lovely, but they will not for an instant bear comparison with that. Besides, I would not deprive you of it. Saying that I coveted it was a mere form of speech."

“I am sure of that," he said smiling. “But come "—rising as he spoke from the bench where they were sitting—"I do not think we have half seen this charming place. Let us wander a little."

It is a very charming place the *alameda* of Querétaro. Great trees fill it with sylvan shade and beauty, arching their boughs over the broad walks lined with hedges of roses, which fill the air with their perfume and are free to all who may wish to gather them. At this moment the sun, which had been filling the green glades with spears of golden light, having sunk lower towards the crest of the western mountains, behind which he would soon disappear, was only gilding the tree-tops with his rays, while the avenues leading in all directions from the central fountain-filled space, were left in shadow. Along one of these Dorothea and Travers slowly paced, saying little. The charm of the exquisite evening seemed like a sensible spell which made speech unnecessary. It was not the first time that by a common impulse they had separated from the others to enjoy with a sense of complete sympathy some beautiful scene together.

"For although Mr. Travers has many characteristics which I do not like," Dorothea once confided to her sister, "he undoubtedly possesses a very fine appreciation of things which not many people are able to appreciate at all. *He feels the inexpressible*."

"If it is inexpressible, how do you know that he feels it?” Mrs. Langdon asked.

"Don't be dense, Margaret," Dorothea returned with some disdain. “You know perfectly well what I mean. You know that one sees and feels at once when others see and feel things which touch one most deeply, but which are inexpressible."

It was this sense of the inexpressible which now, as more than once before, held silent the two who walked in the shade-arched, rose-embowered vista that seemed leading to some wonderful vision of sunset pomp afar. For all who are gifted with imaginative perception know that it is not so much what the bodily eye perceives which causes delight in such scenes, as the suggestions and visions that fancy draws from the deep reservoir of the past, of history, and romance. “That strange, plaintive music which old things make in ears able to hear it," is incommunicable to those who have not ears for such harmony, but it is understood without speech between those who do hear and comprehend.

It was only when they came to the verge of the *alameda* and saw before them the sunset-flooded plain, with the tall arches of the aqueduct stretching across it, and the misty, purple mountains lying afar against a sky of ineffable radiance, that Dorothea paused, as if smitten by sudden emotion.

“It is divinely beautiful," she said, "and it looks as if it were a fit scene for anything."

“Yes," said Travers. “All that is most picturesque in human life becomes possible amid such surroundings. And even the shadow of tragedy does not seem inappropriate—for without tragedy we should have no heroism."

The shadow of which he spoke seemed to fall over the brightness of Dorothea's face. She shook her head. "I cannot feel that," she said. “Why did you mention the tragedy? I had forgotten it for a moment.”

"I mentioned it because I cannot forget it," he replied. "It haunts me so persistently that, instead of endeavouring to escape, I am determined to face it. I am going to-morrow morning to the Cerro de las Campanas."

“No!" exclaimed Dorothea in a tone of protest.

“Yes," he returned. “I know myself well, and I always find it best to meet boldly and overcome, as it were, a haunting impression of this kind. I shall go to that spot and face its memories once for all. If I dared, I would advise you to come with me and do the same."

“No, no!" she repeated, lifting her hands as if to repel the suggestion. "It would be terrible. I should see it all so plainly. You have no idea how plainly I see such things!"

“For that very reason—go! Face the utmost that your imagination can represent, and afterwards you will cease to be tormented by its constant attempt to bring before you that from which you shrink."

She looked at him curiously. “You speak as if you knew," she said.

“I do know," he answered. “I have tried this method with success many times, and I have an imagination which gives me, I think, as much trouble as yours can possibly give you. I have ordered a carriage to be in waiting for me at sunrise to-morrow to take me to that hill at which you shudder whenever your glance falls upon it, and I hereby invite you to accompany me. If you desire, no one shall know of the expedition. We will return by breakfast-time."

“It sounds very clandestine," she said hesitatingly, "although of course there would be no harm in it. And I confess that I am divided between a strange attraction that draws me to that spot and a repulsion which makes me desire to avoid it. To go there would certainly be painful, and yet—"

"Pain is like everything else," said Travers philosophically. "Meet it boldly and it loses its power. Don't pledge yourself to any decision now, but I think that to-morrow morning you will probably meet me at six o'clock in the court of the hotel. I shall give you ten minutes' grace. If in that time you do not come, I will go without you."

Following his advice, she made no reply. But he perceived that her face wore still an aspect of thoughtfulness and indecision when, turning presently, they left the plain swimming in golden light, with the great aqueduct like a memory of the Campagna striding across it, and the distant mountains wearing the solemn radiance which comes to them at evening time, and walked back along the shaded avenues to the fountain and the carved stone benches where the rest of the party sat and talked with an air of pleasant leisure and content.

It was perhaps in recognition of the correctness of his own judgment that Travers smiled slightly to himself as he stood the next morning in the open door of the hotel, shivering a little in the crisp coolness of the early atmosphere, and heard a quick step crossing the paved court behind him. But the smile had vanished even from his eyes when he turned to greet Dorothea.

"I thought you would come," he said quietly. “Here is the carriage awaiting us. Let me put you in."

"I feel as if I were eloping!" said Dorothea, as he followed her and closed the door. "Margaret waked, of course—she sleeps like a cat!—and asked where I was going. I said, 'On a pilgrimage,' and she made no further inquiry, perhaps because she went to sleep again immediately. It does seem an absurdly surreptitious way of doing what no one would object to. But I was so positive about not going to any of these places—and one does not like to be inconsistent beyond a certain point."

Travers discreetly forbore to inquire where this point was to be found; but merely remarking that in his opinion only stupidity was ever entirely consistent, directed his companion's attention to the various sights of the awakening streets, and after they left the city the attention of both was absorbed by the sunrise which was filling the whole eastern heaven with colour and glory.

For while the sunsets of Mexico are rarely beautiful, and linger in the memory as among the loveliest of earth, they are but pale compared to the matchless radiance of sunrise in this land to which the sun comes ever as a bridegroom to his bride in royal pomp and splendour. Words have never been coined by human speech with which to paint these divine tints, these miracles of colour, these flushes of rose and carmine shot with gold, the unimaginable opaline hues and flame-like glories which are spread in constantly changing magnificence upon the eastern sky for one enchanted hour every day.

"Is it not wonderful?" said Dorothea, her eyes fastened on the flushing radiance which heralded the coming of the day-god. “One cannot feel surprise that Mexicans, as a rule, seem to be early risers. Such glory as this is enough to rise for!"

Even as she spoke the sun appeared in dazzling majesty and sent his first level shafts of light over the rugged plain across which they were driving. She sank back with blinded eyes. "Evidently," she observed, "I have no kinship with the eagle. But I think that hereafter I shall rise for this wonderful pageant every morning."

"Ah," said Travers in a tone of half-pitying admiration, “how young you are yet to have faith enough in yourself to make a resolution certain to be broken within twenty-four hours!"

So far they had avoided all mention of what was in the minds of both—the vivid memory of the mournful procession which at this very hour had wound across the plain in the radiance of a June morning toward the sad hill which now lifted its long, lonely slope before them. But silence sprang from the very keenness of recollection, and as they drove onward without further exchange of speech the imagination of each was busy in painting that scene—in following, indeed as pilgrims, this veritable Via Dolorosa along which the noble hearts that hoped so highly and laboured so truly for the best good of Mexico had gone to death. To Dorothea those rays of sunlight which had blinded her seemed flashing on the bayonets of the soldiers who marched onward to do their murderous work, and on the encircling hosts of an army which made this act of savage vengeance possible.

Presently she spoke, but it was to murmur a line of poetry to herself:

"'A traitor sold him to his foes;
O deed of deathless shame!'

Does he live yet, that traitor?" she asked abruptly.

"Lopez? I think so," Travers replied. "Known, however, as 'the traitor,' and execrated and despised by all men who recognise the value of faith and honour in human life. But here we are!"

Midway up the long slope of the stony hillside is the spot, marked by three crosses, where he whose eyes first opened to the light in a royal palace took

"... his latest look
Of earth and sun and day,"

together with the brave Mexicans who had led rather than followed his fortunes. Fairer picture this world cannot show than that which lay before the doomed men as they gazed—who can tell with what anguish of heart!—upon the beautiful land they were leaving to sink beneath the tyranny of a despotism which from that fatal day has never relaxed its hold. Across the valley lay the lovely city, its richly glazed domes shining now as then in the early sunlight, and its exquisite towers rising into the golden air above the soft greenery of its gardens and avenues; far and wide spread the great plain which seemed formed by Nature to be the theatre of some such tragedy of war as had taken place upon it, some such marshalling of forces for a last terrible struggle, made vital and intense by passion that had drenched the land in blood for half a century, while, framing the vast picture, the mountains with their aspect of serene, majestic calm stood wrapped in the ethereal blue of heaven.

"There is no difference—none," said Dorothea at last in a low tone. "Except the presence of the hostile army below, we see the scene exactly as they saw it!"

"Yes," said Travers, who stood in the sunlight with uncovered head, "and for myself I am glad to have come, glad to carry away the memory of a spot made sacred by the fact that here one brave heart met, as became the son of kings, a death which he had chosen in preference to dishonour."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CITY OF THE CONQUERORS.

IT is very early morning when the through train from the north enters, by the great cut of the Nochistongo, the Valley of Mexico—that valley which Cortes declared to be "*la cosa mas hermosa en el mundo*." And the traveller who does not echo the words of the bold Spaniard, as he, too, looks for the first time upon its surpassing loveliness, must be insensible to all natural beauty. For "the most beautiful thing in all the world" it still remains, with its spreading leagues of green fertility, its broad white roads leading between rows of stately trees towards picturesque towns and verdure-embowered villages, its shadowy woods, its shining waters, and its vast chain of encircling mountains dominated by the majestic forms of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, which

lift their massive, snowclad summits into the blue depths of heaven, eternal guardians of the plain below.

More and more beautiful this plain seems to grow as the train speeds across its wide expanse. The radiant splendour of a Mexican morning is spread over it like a mantle of glory, while enchanting pictures succeed each other on every side. Beyond thick-set hedges of century plants stretch wide fields and pastures, with water flashing in the *acequias* which cross the land in all directions and produce its bounteous fertility; glistening domes and towers, richly carved and softly pink or grey in tone, rise in the golden air from unseen towns; the roads are filled with picturesque groups of people, and burros with panniers, bearing the produce of the land towards the great city near at hand. With fascinated interest the party of strangers watch these varying scenes, yet, in the case of some of them at least, the eye was not satisfied alone with seeing. Before the imagination unrolled a more vivid panorama yet: the marvellous story, with all its brilliant and romantic phases, of which this valley of paradise has been the theatre.

"It was not strange that the Aztecs founded the seat of their empire here," said Mrs. Langdon. "They must have felt that they had reached the culminating point, that not even this wonderful land could show them anything more beautiful. There was no need, one would think, of an eagle on a cactus branch to tell them where to build their city."

“Without that sign they might not have thought of placing it, like another Venice, on the waters," said Russell. "I have often tried to fancy what a picture lake girt Tenochtitlan must have presented to the gaze of the Spaniards who looked upon it first."

"With its great temples and floating gardens, and the shining surface of its lakes covered with canoes filled with feather-clad warriors brilliant as tropical birds!” said Travers. "It is the fashion now to discredit those descriptions of Prescott which were the delight of one's youth; but he drew them directly from the Spanish chronicles, written by those who saw what they described. And who should be believed, I would like to know, if eye-witnesses are not? For my part, I devoutly credit every word, and the more I see of the country the more my envy of the conquistadores grows. Never before were mortal men so permitted to realise their wildest dreams, or to find their wildest dreams surpassed by reality."

"We are not passing over the scenes of any of Cortes's early operations just now, are we?" asked the general.

“No," Russell answered. “All these were conducted to the eastward of the city. But every foot of this valley is historic ground, and filled, to the imagination, with great historic figures. I am sure"—he looked at Dorothea with a smile—"that you can see at this moment a band of the bold adventurers who have conquered the imperial city riding along the highway yonder, with their armour and lances glittering in the sunlight, their plumes tossing, their banners gleaming against the sky. And let us not forget what manner of device those banners bore blazoned upon them. 'Friends,' said that of Cortes, 'let us follow the Cross; and if we have faith, by this sign we shall conquer.'"*

“Ah, there were no qualms of doubt in their faith," said Travers. "How splendidly robust it was, how absolutely a living and controlling force! And, therefore, what great things it animated them to accomplish! Not to understand how far the passionate ideal of a religious

* " Amici, sequamur Crucem, et si nos fidem habemus vere in hoc signo vincemus."

apostolate inspired the great Spanish conquests of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, is not to understand the era or the people at all."

“There is no doubt of one thing," said the general, "that, whatever inspired him, Cortes was one of the greatest captains of that or any other age. Never before or since did conqueror attain such great results with such inadequate means, never did soldier of fortune rise so suddenly to the full height of unparalleled opportunities and display such splendid daring, genius, and resource."

“There are some blots upon his character," said Russell. "But when we consider the age and his exceptional position, also the fact that he was in training a mere soldier of fortune, we must acknowledge that they are very few, and may well be forgotten in the lustre of his great qualities, his heroic courage, his brilliant genius, his indomitable resolution, and his wisdom and moderation in victory."

“I think," said Dorothea, "that we should be very grateful for the fact that it was Spaniards who discovered this marvellous country, and who were therefore able to plant here a civilisation so picturesque, an architecture so delightful and harmonious, and a charm of romance such as no other people possess or can bestow."

“There are deeper reasons than those to be grateful that we have here New Spain—" Russell was beginning, when he suddenly interrupted himself to point ahead:

“Mexico!" he said—and there, shining before them in the early sunlight, undimmed by faintest stain or blur of smoke, were the stately towers and gleaming domes of the City of the Conquerors. A splendid mass of glowing and varied colour, it rose above its encircling walls, from which the lakes that once encompassed it have now receded, leaving in their stead emerald fields level as the waters that danced over them at the time of the Conquest, and crossed by broad, straight avenues, lined with noble trees, that follow exactly the course of the ancient causeways as they lead to the different gates. There are no squalid or grimy suburbs to disfigure the approach. Straight from the expanse of the vast green valley, from the wind blowing freshly over leagues of cornland and meadows where the rich alfalfa stands knee-deep, from the amethystine mountains and the lines of graceful pepper-trees with their drooping boughs, the train plunges into the city's heart, and presently ends its long run from the northern border in the station of Buena Vista.

No matter how often one has made this entrance there is always delight for the eye and spirit in the drive from the station through the streets in the exquisite freshness of early morning. Clean-swept as those of Paris, asphalt-paved, and lined with handsome buildings, the mere sight of these streets informs the stranger that he is in no obscure provincial city, but in one of the capitals of the world—opulent, fascinating, brilliant, abounding in attractions for all kinds and conditions of men. The drive has, moreover, the advantage of being through a quarter abounding in noble residences and beautiful gardens, and when, turning into the broad and stately *avenida*, the carriage rolls past the green glades and dream-like vistas of the *alameda* on one side, while on the other rise houses with fronts of richly sculptured stone and balconies of delicately wrought and gilded iron, the new-comer must be impassive indeed who would not echo Dorothea's cry of enthusiastic admiration.

A little farther, a turn to the right, and they stopped before the entrance to the most picturesque hostelry in Mexico—one is tempted to say in the world—the Hotel del Jardin.

View of Puebla

Russell had declared that a single glance would tell them why he had chosen this hotel; and certainly no more than a single glance was necessary after they had entered a vestibule, mounted a short flight of marble steps, and passed through wide gates of wrought iron, to make them pause to take in the picture before them.

They did not yet know the significance of this picture, but there could be no question of its charm for the eye. A great garden, containing a mass of flowers and shrubs, with here and there noble trees which lifted their wide crowns of green foliage towards heaven, while roses and azaleas, pomegranate and jasmine bloomed in their shade, filled a quadrangle of several hundred feet in extent, around two sides of which extended an immense building, with apparently innumerable doors opening on a wide gallery below and a narrower balcony above. The shining pavement of this gallery stretched away in glistening vista before the newcomers, with tall iron railings on one side dividing it from the beauty and fragrance of the garden, and on the other partially open doors giving a glimpse of spacious rooms. It was evident that there were no inner passages—that every apartment opened on the vast, flower-filled court.

“By Jove!" said the general; "this is more like a palace than a hotel. What is it?"

“It is all that is left of the greatest monastic foundation in New Spain," Russell replied. "The story of its ruin is too long to tell now. Let us settle ourselves and afterwards you shall hear it."

Dorothea, however, remained motionless. "It is enchantingly picturesque," she said, "but there must have been terrible injustice, not to speak of barbarism, to bring it to *this*. And I don't wish to have any part in sacrilege—not even the small part of a lodge within stolen walls."

“I do not feel in that manner," said her sister. “I think it will be a privilege to rest within such ancient and venerable walls. In the injustice, the barbarism, and the sacrilege which have wrought this wrong we have no part—not even the passive part of approving or condoning."

"Well said!" remarked Mr. Travers in a tone of approbation. "Mrs. Langdon has an incomparable good sense which always contrives to see things in the right light."

“I observe that it is generally the light in which one would wish to see them," said Dorothea, "and this leads me to suspect that Margaret is something of a diplomatist. But, as usual, I find her point of view agreeable and convenient."

“Mrs. Langdon is right, señorita," said Don Rodolfo. “It is not worth while to punish yourself for the misdeeds of others. Our country is indeed shamed by the acts of sacrilegious vandalism of which this is the greatest, but if the spirits of any of the despoiled monks could speak to you, I am sure they would say that you are welcome to this, their ancient cloisters, because you come with a gentle heart and a good intention."

"Our friend Don Rodolfo waxes complimentary," Travers murmured aside to Dorothea. "He is quite right about the good intention. I can see by the light in your eyes that if you had the power the desecration of these walls would not continue an hour longer. But when he speaks of a gentle heart—" Here the speaker lightly lifted his shoulders in that Gallic gesture which is more eloquent than many words.

Dorothea vouchsafed him no reply. She turned to the others. “Come," she said. “Let us see where we are to be lodged."

A few minutes later saw them settled in large, airy chambers on the second floor, from the balcony in front of which they looked down on the lovely garden and into the green branches of its tall trees. Apart from all associations it was a fascinating spot, but with these associations it possessed a charm more penetrating and pathetic than words can express. For, as the gaze wandered beyond the enclosure filled with bloom and fragrance, where something like a cloistral peace still reigns, it passed over intervening streets and houses to be caught and held by the sight of a building so vast and imposing as to rivet attention at once. Like the survival of another world, this great edifice lifted above the roofs of the modern dwellings surrounding it grand, fortress-like walls of dark grey stone and evident antiquity, crowned by a dome of incomparable grace and majesty.

"What a superb old church!" said the general. "Is it the cathedral?"

"No," Russell answered. "It is the ancient monastic church of San Francisco. We are standing now in a portion of its monastery, and those walls at which you are gazing embody the whole story of Mexico from the time of the Conquest."

"They look as if they might embody the history of the primeval world, and might last to witness the end of ours," said Dorothea. “Nothing could give a deeper impression of majestic strength. Tell us its story, Mr. Russell."

"Where shall I begin?" asked Russell. "It is, as I have said, the story of Mexico. It was Cortes himself who gave to the first Franciscan missionaries— the little band called the Twelve Apostles of Mexico—the land on which it stands, and which had been occupied by the gardens

and wild-beast house of the kings of Tenochtitlan. We are told that the first church was constructed of hewn stone from the steps of the great Teocalli."

"That old church yonder looks as if it might be the same," said Travers, regarding the massive antiquity of its walls.

"No," said Russell, "it is of later construction. But this monastery was the first, as it remained to its end the greatest, of the religious foundations of New Spain. Here was erected the first parish church for the Indians in the New World. From this spot went forth the missionaries who, undeterred by dangers and hardships, penetrated the remotest parts of the country, winning a nation to Christianity, laying broad and deep the foundations of the moral and social order which we find to-day, and gaining the hearts of the people by standing ever between them and the possible oppression of their conquerors. It is not too much to say that every descendant of *los naturales* owes such a debt of gratitude to the monks who have been robbed and driven forth here as all the mines of Mexico are too poor to pay."

"And it has been paid—thus!" said Mrs. Langdon, waving her hand towards the scene around them.

"Yes," said Russell. “It seems difficult to believe that any people could have been guilty of the incredible vandalism of destroying the very cradle of their national life; for apart from all claims to veneration as a sanctuary, the most historical spot in Mexico perished when the barbarous hand of the destroyer fell upon the monastery and churches of San Francisco." *

“It must have been of immense extent, if this building in which we are standing was the monastery of that church," said the general.

“In its three centuries of existence it naturally acquired great wealth and splendour," said Russell. "Around the majestic central church yonder were gathered a group of chapels famous throughout Mexico for their beauty, their antiquity, and their associations of holiness. Known as 'the seven churches of San Francisco,' they formed a whole of unequalled beauty and inestimable value to the scholar, the antiquarian, and the artist. Of this noble group of sanctuaries only the great church remains, a piteous spectacle of desecration. Its altars are demolished, its splendid decorations gone, its interior, once glowing with colour and beauty, has been well described as 'a horror of whitewash and desolation,' where some band of Protestant sectaries hold their meetings, in this spot where the greatest and most historical functions of religion had from the foundation of the country taken place."

"But why," asked the general, "should such a special rage of destruction have spent itself on a spot with such peculiar claims to veneration?"

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* The history of this foundation may almost be said to be the history of Mexico, for contained in it, or linked with it, is almost every event of importance in the colonial or national life. From this centre radiated the commanding influence of the Franciscan order—the strong power that kept what was won by military force, and that by its own peaceful methods greatly extended the territorial limits of New Spain. Here Masses were heard by Cortes, and here for a time his bones were laid. Here through three centuries the great festivals of the church were taken part in by the Spanish viceroys. Here was sung the first *Te Deum* in celebration of Mexican independence, the most conspicuous man in the rejoicing assemblage being General Agustin Yturbide—by whom, virtually, Mexican independence was won; and here, seventeen years later, were held the magnificent funeral services when Yturbide—his imperial error forgiven and his claim to the title of Liberator alone remembered—was buried. Around no other building in Mexico cluster such associations as are gathered here.— Thomas A. Janvier.

“Partly because of those claims, but more especially because of the extent and value of the property included in the boundaries of the monastery. Cupidity as well as hatred of religion found a pretext in the shallow story of a pretended plot against the government to seize what had long been coveted."

“Margaret," said Dorothea indignantly, "you may consider it a privilege to be within such walls, but I most distinctly do not. I feel as if by merely being here I have part in the desecration, the sacrilege, the unspeakable barbarism!"

"But you have not," said the general practically, "so don't be fanciful, my dear. And now I really think we had better be seeing about some breakfast."

This moderate suggestion met with general approval, and in a restaurant at the gate—to which one corner of the beautiful garden has been sacrificed—they breakfasted in a sufficiently satisfactory manner, the more so perhaps for the charming picture to be seen through the window by which they sat, where the gaze wandered over masses of shrubbery and banks of flowers. Breakfast over, Miss Graham decided that she was too tired to undertake any sight-seeing, but the others set forth to make acquaintance with the city in which centre all the charm and fascination of this fascinating country, all the thrilling story of its romantic past, and all the wonderful blending of old and new civilisations. Like Mexico itself, the capital is full of an almost inexhaustible interest, and of a spell that grows deeper as one knows it longer and becomes more steeped in its picturesque traditions and phases of life. Perhaps the first thing which struck the strangers as they issued from the Hotel del Jardin into the broad and handsome Calle Independencia was the excessively modern aspect of their surroundings. It was Paris again, which was brought to their minds by these stately houses built of light-coloured stone richly carved around the doors and windows, and brightened by balconies of gilded iron, while passing into the street of San Francisco, the brilliant shop-windows might have made them fancy themselves in the Rue de la Paix. The throng of people filling this always crowded street was also, as a whole, modern and cosmopolitan in the extreme; only accentuated here and there by some example of the native type. Russell smiled when the general observed that the city differed strikingly in this particular from those they had already seen.

“This," he said, "is the thoroughfare where all the modern life of the capital shows itself; but if you turn aside and follow one of these intersecting streets for a short distance, you will find yourself in scenes and surroundings as purely Mexican as if no railroad had yet penetrated the country. There are quarters of the city where the sight of a foreign face and the sound of a foreign tongue are as unknown as in the most remote village."

It was difficult to credit this in the midst of the signs of wealth and luxury surrounding them. Perfectly appointed equipages swept by, ladies whose toilettes were of the most distinguished elegance lay back on their cushions or crossed the crowded pavements into shops where the choicest confections of France were to be seen; the brilliantly varied life of an opulent society passed in ceaseless stream. Presently the glittering thoroughfare came to an end on the great Plaza Mayor—the heart not only of the present Spanish city but of primitive Tenochtitlan. This plaza, part of which was included in the grounds belonging to the great Aztec temple, and a part to the palace of Montezuma, has a history full of picturesque vicissitudes and turbulent chapters. It is of immense extent, and would be exceedingly imposing but for the garden which occupies a portion of its space, and unfortunately ruins the view of the cathedral. It is impossible

to condemn too strongly the artistic mistake of destroying the effect of the superb façade of this great edifice—the finest on the American continent—by the planting of trees and shrubs in front of it. The gardens which encroach on the space of the atrium should specially be swept away, so that the noble proportions of the building would not be obscured as at present.

Built on the exact site of the Aztec temple (*teocalli*), which the Spaniards destroyed, and the land of which was at once set aside that upon it might be erected a Christian church, this great sanctuary is a fit peer for those glorious cathedrals of Spain on which it is modelled. Splendid, massive, and in its proportions only equalled by the most famous churches of the Old World, it is at once impressive in its architectural effect and deeply interesting in its historical associations. Passing through the gardens, the party paused in mute admiration before the superb façade which rises, with a majesty that nothing can diminish, above its circumscribed atrium.

The basso-relievos, statues, friezes, bases, and capitals with which the whole front is profusely decorated are all of white marble, and make a harmonious effect with the light-grey stone of which the church itself is constructed. About this noble façade, with its three vast portals and its elegant Doric details, rise the great towers to a height of more than two hundred feet, finished with very beautiful architectural details. The cornices of these towers, as of the building everywhere, are surmounted by balustrades of carved stone, which serve as pedestals for colossal statues of the doctors of the church and the patriarchs of the monastic orders; while above the central portal is a group of the theological virtues, with their symbols. Crowning the whole is the great dome surmounted by its slender, graceful lantern. Immediately adjoining the cathedral on the east, and forming one mass with it, is the very beautiful church of the Sagrario—the first parish church, which is dedicated to Santiago (St. James), the patron of Spain. This exquisite building is in the churrigueresque style, and communicates with the cathedral by interior doors. "Its rich façade and harmonious mass," says a very competent art critic, "contrasts agreeably with the grander mass and severer style of the cathedral. So admirable is the work—in its elegance and purity of complicated filigree carved in stone—that it may be accepted as a standard of excellence by which to judge other productions in the same curious but (when judiciously used) highly effective style."

The interior of the cathedral in that style, known as the Spanish Renaissance, which prevailed so extensively in Spain during the sixteenth century, is majestic and impressive in the extreme. There are some unsatisfactory details, but these are lost sight of in an overwhelming impression of stately magnificence. One walks down the wide aisles, past chapel after chapel, before the grated doors of which scattered groups are kneeling, and within which lamps are burning before such rich old altars as can be seen nowhere else out of Spain, altars that from floor to lofty roof are one mass of elaborate carving, covered with gold, that has taken with the lapse of time an incomparable tint and in the midst of which rare old paintings are set like gems. According to the Spanish fashion, the choir is erected in the middle of the nave, a church within a church. But although it lessens somewhat the interior effect of imposing space, it amply compensates by a marvellous beauty of detail. The stalls are of dark old wood, carved with basso-relievos of the most exquisite finish; two immense organs in carved cases rise from the lateral tribunals to the height of the arches of the aisles, while the great gates of entrance as well as the railing of the tribunals, and the railing which encloses on each side the passage-way between the choir and the high altar, are composed of a metal known as tumbago (a composite of

gold, silver, and copper) of immense value. Of this precious metal the base of the high altar is also formed. This altar is modern, and strikes a jarring note of lack of harmony. But that of Los Reyes (The Kings) immediately behind it, in the apse, is superb. To see anything like it one must go to the great cathedral of Seville, where the same artist executed another altar equally rich and splendid in effect.

"This is the only church in America that has ever witnessed the ceremony of a coronation," Russell observed, as, having made the circuit of the interior, they were resting on one of the dark old benches, polished with use and age, near the rail-enclosed passage-way between the high altar and the choir. Around them spread the solemn vastness of the great edifice, within the massive walls of which no sound from the outer world pierced. Dim shafts of misty sunshine streaming downwards from the high windows fell on hanging banners painted with figures of saints in heroic size, swaying gently on the cords by which they were suspended from the lofty roof.

The spacious aisles stretched away in vistas where every element of majesty blended with the most perfect picturesqueness, while scattered like black dots over the surface were figures kneeling before the altars or around the confessionals or passing noiselessly across the wide expanse of pavement. From behind the grated doors of the chapels, their rich, dim splendours, their lamps, their tombs, their great carven walls and altars covered with mellow gold, produced an indescribable effect alike upon the vision and the imagination.

"One would like," said Dorothea wistfully, in response to Russell's last remark, "to have seen a coronation here! Besides being the only church in America where such a ceremony has ever taken place, it is the only church in America where it could take place. I don't mean politically "—as the general murmured something— "but architecturally. That sounds obscure, but you know what I mean. This "—glancing around comprehensively—"is, like the great cathedrals of Europe, fit to be the setting of such a ceremony. But no other building in the New World is or could possibly be. Here the splendour of a coronation would be entirely appropriate, and I wish"— with an accent of keen regret—"that I had been present when one took place!"

"I might join in your wish," said Travers, “if it were not so entirely the Mexican custom to follow a coronation by shooting the anointed sovereign. The recollection of this fact would detract a little from one's enjoyment of the ceremony. But I confess that one of these tribunes "—he glanced up as he spoke at the carved and gilded balconies projecting from the walls of the choir—" would have been a good position from which to witness the scene. One can fancy Maximillian and Carlotta kneeling yonder, amid blazing lights and smoking incense and bursts of triumphant music!"

Dorothea put her hand to her eyes. In contrast to the glory of the scene thus evoked, there rose before her vision the ineffaceable picture of the sad Hill of the Bells in the early morning, and the death volley, which answered like an echo the cannon of the coronation, seemed to sound in her ear. She rose quickly. "Come," she said, "let us go now. This is a place to which one can return again and yet again and never exhaust its interest or its charm; but we may exhaust ourselves if we remain too long at present."

After the cool, shadowy dimness of the church, the blaze of sunshine, the ineffable brilliancy of sky and air which met them outside was for a moment blinding. More and more they were struck with the air of a great capital in the scenes which surrounded them, in all the

varied and brilliant tide of life that rolled back and forth around the vast Spanish plaza, with its noble setting of palaces, churches, and *portales*. They recalled the saying of Humboldt that Mexico is one of the very finest cities ever built by Europeans in either hemisphere, and only added that they knew not where to match it among any one of those cities. For with the features of many, it has a charm altogether unique and peculiar to itself. Into the streets of Paris or Madrid pour a population picturesque and thronging as that of Naples, place above a sky more brilliantly beautiful than that of Greece, give a climate of eternal spring, set the whole in a valley girdled by mountains mightier than the Alps, sublimer than the Pyrenees—mountains which are to be seen in their distant, azure majesty, closing the vistas of all the long, regular streets—and you will have Mexico!

It was no wonder that it speedily fascinated people so impressionable as those who followed Russell during several hours of delightful wanderings. Avoiding the more modern thoroughfares, he led them through streets full of the spell of those ancient civilisations which they all loved—thoroughfares lined with buildings that seemed transplanted from Europe or the East, and every great portal of which disclosed some picture-like interior. Whether or not every one of these houses dated from the sixteenth century, they were all, in their least detail, built upon the model which the conquistadores introduced. For centuries might have stood the solid walls, the paved courts, the stone staircases, the iron railings, the great carved doors of dark ancient wood. The shops with their brightly frescoed outer walls, their small, dark interiors, their fanciful titles, their presiding religious picture or statue, had no breath of the nineteenth century upon them. Still less had the great old churches, through the vast, sculptured doorways of which they passed into such wonderful interiors, rich with dim splendours of the past as had enthralled them everywhere throughout the country, or the ancient plazas where round some quaintly carved fountain the stone benches had grown grey under the shade of drooping trees, and time seemed to stand still in the sunny quiet.

At length, when they began to grow a little fatigued, their wanderings brought them into a broad, sunshine-flooded avenue, on one side of which two stately churches faced each other across a statue-embellished plazuela, while on the other stretched a park-like mass of verdure and bowery glades. All was light and brilliant, there was a sense of sparkling exhilaration in the atmosphere, to the ear was borne the indescribable mingling of sounds which come from the overflowing life of a great city, as crossing the roadway they entered the lovely pleasure-ground.

It is a dream-like spot this *alameda* of Mexico, a fit setting for the storied past and the picturesque present which seem to meet here. Broad avenues, arched by the interlacing boughs of giant trees, and lined by pleasances filled with exquisite greenness of sward and foliage, lead to great circles in which are fountains with brimming basins filled by Nile lilies, or statues on pedestals of daisy-starred turf, from which radiate in all directions the shadowy vistas that frame at their farther extremities glimpses of the sculptured front or noble tower of some ancient church. Walking down one of these wide avenues, clean swept and freshly watered, while the turf, flowers, shrubs, and even the branches of the trees in the lovely glades on each side were glittering with the spray, which had lately been abundantly showered over them, the party presently found themselves in one of the *glorietas* or circles, where seated half in sunshine, half in shadow, on a carved stone bench of classic form, they proceeded to absorb all the impressions which this delightful spot was able to create upon them. Around the sparkling fountain that filled

the centre of the sweeping circle children were gaily playing, while in and out of the vistas of sun-flecked shade passed, in constant succession, a picturesque variety of figures—diplomats from the European legations near by, students with their heads bent over their open books, stately Mexican gentlemen, Mexican ladies, black-draped, with prayer-books and gleaming rosaries in their hands, on their way from mass, groups of golden-haired English or American girls, labourers in their white cotton garb and gay blankets, venders of *dulces* or of quaint toys of native manufacture, soldiers in uniform with clanking swords. And all around stretched the green depths of the park, with birds singing in the lofty branches of its trees, its beauty, full of a hundred suggestions of the past, declaring as its first and chief impression that all things were possible here—all the romantic and dramatic side of life which the prose of modern materialism is pushing so far away, yet which has its eternal spring in the depths of human existence.

"I shall never forget," said Russell in a reminiscent tone, "my first visit to this place. It was at night. I had arrived in Mexico for the first time that day, and, asking no direction from any one, I wandered out after nightfall to see the city and derive my own impressions from what it should show me. It showed me many things upon which I need not linger, but at length I found myself here, and it seemed to me that I had wandered into the very home of enchantment. The night was starlit, a few lamps shone here and there—for that was before the day of the glaring electric light—and dispelled the darkness only enough to show these receding vistas, these forest-like glades, these balustraded circles with their gleaming fountains, all full of the most delightful depths of shadow and mystery. I strolled about like a man in a dream, while a hundred stories of Spain and old Mexico came to my mind. The hour was late and there were few persons to be met; but suddenly, passing across the *glorieta*, I saw two figures seated at the end of that bench yonder, where the shade is deepest—a woman, whose drapery wrapped her so closely that not even a glimpse of her face was revealed, who was speaking passionately and with tears, while a man pressed close to her side, as if urging some decision upon her. It was a bit of the human drama for which I, and, as it seemed, the whole hushed, deserted scene had been waiting. The dresses, appearance, manner of the actors showed that they did not belong to the common people, and I passed on, thinking regretfully that I should never know what story I had for an instant touched."

"Tell the truth, Russell," said Travers sceptically; "did you not create the story?—did you not add those figures to the picture because the setting seemed to call for them?"

"I repel the charge with indignation," Russell replied, "although I grant that the suspicion is justified. But, I assure you, that the incident occurred as I have narrated, and what romance or what tragedy lay behind it God only knows."

“The Haroun al-Rashid-like viceroy of *A Mexican Night* should have appeared to clear up the mystery for you," said Mrs. Langdon.

"Had we lived one hundred years earlier, nothing could have been more likely than his appearance," Russell replied.

“He was a real person, then?"

“Exceedingly real—a most famous reformer, corrector of abuses and founder of all manner of practical improvements. From his energetic rule the present appearance of the City of Mexico is to be dated. Almost in sight of us is a street—the Calle Revillagigedo — which is a lasting memorial of his peremptory methods of effecting reforms. It was his custom to wander

about the city at all times (but chiefly at night) in order to detect abuses; and so one evening, having entered a street that ended suddenly in a huddle of squalid buildings, he sent for the *corregidor* and ordered him to have the objectionable hovels cleared away at once, and open a fair, wide street to the barrier of the city through which he, the viceroy, might drive the next morning to mass. The street was finished at the appointed time and remains a good thoroughfare to the present day."

"Those are the sort of things," said Dorothea, “that I like to know. How easily, now, one might have walked along that street and never suspected that there was anything to make it more than another street! *Apropos of A Mexican Night* there is one place to which I want to go, if it has an actual existence out of the *Stories of Old New Spain*— San Antonio of the Gardens."

"San Antonio de las *Huertas*!" said Russell. "Oh yes, it has or rather had an actual existence, and the road towards it lies very straight from here."

“Do you think we might go now?" asked she eagerly.

“I object to the motion," interposed Travers. " If my memory serves me, it was agreed that we were to do no sightseeing for some time at least, but to wander at our ease about the city and steep ourselves agreeably in its atmosphere. Now, I am by no means sufficiently steeped in the *alameda* and I protest against being dragged away, even to see a place so poetically named as San Antonio of the Gardens."

“You are incorrigible!" said Dorothea, regarding him with mingled scorn and pity. “I do not know why you do not devote yourself to the society of Violet Graham. I am sure there seems the greatest sympathy between you on some points."

“Not even your sarcasm can force me at present from this ideal spot," he replied. “I find that it combines the attractions of the most widely different places—for example, of the Champs Elysees and the primitive forest. Could anything be more suggestive of the first than that, or of the second than this?"

He indicated two figures which, following each other closely, had passed before them as he spoke—one a lady, attired in the extreme of Parisian fashion and attended by her maid, her delicate arched feet scarcely seeming to tread the earth as she walked by with graceful, elastic step under the shade of her lace-draped parasol; the other a woman of the purest Indian type, her bare feet, her long, straight black hair streaming around her dark face, her ragged dress, all testifying to extreme poverty, while, in aboriginal fashion, a child hung on her back in the folds of her faded *rebozo*—as wild, pathetic, savage a figure as could have passed across the Indian market which existed on this spot before ever the Spaniards entered lake-guarded Tenochitlan.

“Oh," cried Dorothea quickly, forgetting her grievance, "I have noticed many such contrasts since we have been sitting here. They give indeed a wonderful flavour of uniqueness to the scene, for here we have a great capital, with all the air of a long-established civilisation, with its beauty, its luxury, its wealth, and moving through its streets and pleasure grounds are forms and faces that seem to have stepped from a primeval forest. It strikes one as very strange— and marvellously interesting!"

“I have seen more examples of wretched poverty this morning than in the whole country before," remarked the general decidedly.

“Mexico," said Russell, “is a city of extremes—of great opulence and great poverty. It is also a mirror of the nation, as every capital should be, although, owing to the cosmopolitan

character which it is rapidly assuming, it is somewhat losing national flavour. But, let the foreigner come or go, it must still remain the most unique and brilliant city of the New World, with a charm of picturesqueness, a fascination of story which, save here, one must seek in vain on this side of the ocean."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HEART OF MEXICO.

PERHAPS it was only what was to have been expected that, after a few days in the capital, the differing tastes of the several members of the party should have led them into widely divergent ways. Heretofore necessity had been the bond which during their journey had held them together; but now this necessity being relaxed, the natural variation of taste at once displayed itself. Needless to say that Violet Graham, finding some acquaintances—especially a friend who had married a foreign *diplomate* now representing his government in Mexico—and delighted with the cosmopolitan Mexicans whom Don Rodolfo introduced, plunged eagerly into the social life which was the only form of existence for which she cared, and affirmed with emphasis that the compensation for a tour in Mexico was the pleasure of reaching at last a city which offered so many attractions.

“For it is more like a capital of Europe than of America," she remarked to the amused Margaret and the somewhat disgusted Dorothea. “I can almost fancy myself in Paris, especially when I am in those beautiful rooms of Antoinette de Brissac. Her apartments are charming, and sitting on her balcony overlooking the *avenida* at five o'clock in the afternoon, one might fancy one's self on the Champs Elysées. After all, there are worse places in the world than this in which to live—provided, of course, one had abundance of money."

“You are taking into consideration living here, then," said Dorothea, unable to repress a slight sarcastic accent in her voice.

"Why not?" replied Miss Graham calmly. "It is a very delightful and brilliant city, near home yet with a foreign atmosphere. And if one were not obliged to live here all the time—if one belonged to diplomatic circles abroad—"

“In short, Don Rodolfo's star is just now in the ascendant," said Miss Meynell. "It is perhaps fortunate for him that he does not know how many other stars have been in the ascendant in their time."

"More apparently than really," returned the other, with undiminished amiability of air and manner. "It has not been my fault that a great many men have been foolish about me. Every one who really knew me must have known always how totally impossible it would have been for me, with my tastes and ideas of life, to think of marrying an ordinary professional man with a limited professional income. I have always been quite decided in my mind that when I marry I must have two things—great wealth and a certain brilliancy of social position."

“You are very moderate," said Mrs. Langdon, smiling, for Dorothea was speechless after the calmly crushing statement with regard to professional men.

Miss Graham glanced at a mirror, with an expression which said as distinctly as words that she had a right to put her requirements high. “Why should one be moderate unless it is a matter of necessity?" she asked. "I grant that with most women it is a matter of necessity; but with me—well, I have never doubted that it was in my power to obtain what I wanted. It is a little singular, however, that I should have come to Mexico to find it. How little I dreamed of such a thing when I accepted your invitation to join your party!"

“And so you have decided to marry Don Rodolfo!" said Dorothea, recovering herself. "But are you quite sure he unites the things you desire? For instance, wealth. Don Rafael de Vargas is a very rich man—but he has a large family."

“Don Rodolfo has inherited from an uncle, and is a rich man independently of his father," replied Miss Graham. "I have no intention of taking anything for granted, and Antoinette has kindly made inquiries for me. There is a very brilliant future before Don Rodolfo—and personally I find him very charming."

“We are to offer our congratulations, then?” asked Mrs. Langdon.

"If you like. Although, of course, nothing is settled or to be declared until Don Rodolfo goes to New Orleans and offers himself formally to papa. How astonished he will be!" the young lady added with a laugh. "He does not know any more about Mexicans than we did when we started from home, and the idea of a Mexican son-in-law will at first prove rather startling."

“Poor Don Rodolfo!" said Dorothea presently, when she was alone with her sister. “I feel as if we had served him a very bad turn by bringing this heartless creature into his life. I say 'we,' and yet it is all my fault—solely. I do not know how I am to forgive myself."

"That is rather an exaggerated view of the matter," said Mrs. Langdon. "Life would be a much worse affair even than it is if we were accountable for all the unforeseen results that may arise from our simplest actions. You certainly could not foresee, when you invited Violet to join our party, that she would meet and marry a man of whose existence you were not aware."

“No, I could not foresee that," said Dorothea. “But I have been sorry ever since we started that I did invite her. She has, in great measure, spoiled the journey for us, and now she is going to spoil his whole life for Don Rodolfo. Of course I am not absolutely accountable for the last, yet I feel a culprit and a wretch all the same, since but for my folly he would never have seen her."

“I do not think that she will spoil Don Rodolfo's life," said Mrs. Langdon. “On the contrary, I believe that she is exactly the woman who will suit him best. They like the same kind of existence, hold the same things of highest value, and have the same ambitions. Instead of reproaching yourself, you might feel that you have been the unconscious instrument of bringing together two people whose tastes and desires are in perfect harmony, and who will, therefore, have a fairer chance of being happy together than falls to the lot of most persons."

"You are only saying these things to console me, Margaret. You know that Violet Graham can never make anyone happy."

"I do not know anything of the kind. As I have said, I think she will prove precisely the wife for a man of the world who wants a beautiful and fashionable woman to do him credit. For such a man rest assured she has heart enough."

“She has impertinence enough for anything," said Dorothea indignantly. "Of course you understood that she was alluding to Phil when she spoke of the impossibility of her marrying 'an ordinary professional man with a limited professional income.' What a pity that Don Rodolfo made his appearance, else she would have been forced to recognise the unflattering fact that she had not the choice of doing so!"

Mrs. Langdon laughed. "Your face was a study just at that moment," she said. “Why are you so foolish as to suffer her to exasperate you, when things have arranged themselves so much better than might have been the case had Phil's old infatuation revived on renewed association with her? Then, indeed, you might have felt that you could hardly forgive yourself for bringing her."

“It is true," Dorothea assented with unwonted humility. "I have fared in the matter better than my folly deserved. I cannot ask anything better for Phil than that he shall marry Mercedes de Vargas—if only her parents will consent."

“Let us hope for the best," said Mrs. Langdon cheerfully. "Meanwhile I am thankful to say that we are to be relieved of Violet's society for a time at least. She is going to stay with the Baroness de Brissac, and revel in toilettes and society to her heart's content."

“Ah, what good news!" cried Dorothea, softly clapping her hands. "How charmed Mr. Travers will be! Now we can go where we please, without dragging a dead- weight of uninterested inanity with us. To celebrate the event, let us take a drive on the Paseo!"

“It is early for the Paseo," Margaret objected.

“So much the better. We will go to Chapultepec and enjoy the sunset—I should like to go there every evening while we remain in Mexico!—and return in time to join all the world in its dress-parade, and hear a few strains of music."

No one offering any objection to this, an hour later saw them rolling along the noble avenue—fit to be the setting of a Roman triumph—of the Paseo de la Reforma. There is not in Europe or America a more beautiful drive than this which leads straight as an arrow from the city to the gates of historic Chapultepec. The magnificent roadway shaded by rows of spreading trees, beneath which are broad sidewalks for pedestrians, lined by carved stone benches, extends for two miles in level straightness, broken at intervals by spacious *glorietas*, adorned by imposing groups of statuary, while its leafy vista frames in remote perspective the famous castle on its craggy height. Here at a late hour of the afternoon fashion makes a display as brilliant as that of the Champs Elysées, and far more picturesque; but as yet the avenue in all its wide stateliness lay still and deserted as a country road, with no flashing equipages or prancing horses to distract attention from the beauty of its unequalled adornments, or the glorious scene spreading beyond, where the grey arches of an aqueduct dating from the days of Aztec kings crosses the loveliness of the green valley, where tiled domes shine in the afternoon sunlight, and graceful minarets spring into golden air above massed foliage, and where far away, yet looking wonderfully near in the radiant clearness of the atmosphere, the great volcanoes lift their solemn forms and dazzling summits against the eastern sky.

"There is nothing in the world to equal it —nothing!" Dorothea declared. "Not a capital in Europe has a promenade so beautiful, with surroundings so picturesque and majestic."

"What a fine conception these statue-adorned circles are!" said Mrs. Langdon, as they drove around the wide arc of the *glorieta* containing the noble Columbus group. “But it seems a

trifle inconsistent," she added, looking at the cowled figures surrounding the great discoverer, "that a country which has banished monks in the flesh should glorify them in bronze."

A street in Puebla

“Such inconsistencies are difficult to avoid," said Russell, "since no one can tell the story of the discovery of America and omit those figures, which stand on every page of its history. Besides, this monument is erected by private munificence. It is doubtful if those who represent Mexico at present would be likely under any circumstances to remember the debt they owe to these monks, or to place any memorial of them before the eyes of the people. "

Meanwhile before their own eyes, as they drove rapidly onward, the castle of Chapultepec loomed more and more grandly, seated on its rocky throne. Sweeping presently through the wide gates of the park, they found themselves in the dim shade of those giant cypresses which were old before the Spaniard set foot on the soil of the New World. There is no more impressive sight in Mexico than the grove of these immense, moss-draped trees surrounding the base of this hill that from earliest times was the fortress and burial-place of Aztec kings. Under the twilight of their mighty boughs fancy seems still to see the forms of those ancient chiefs with their feather-adorned warriors, the gleaming mail-clad forms of the conquistadores, the richly apparelled courtiers of the viceroys, who made here their summer palace, and—last and most pathetic—the mournful presences of Maximilian and Carlotta, as they played their brief and tragic drama of imperial state. It was no wonder that Dorothea was strangely silent as they drove under the great shadow-haunted boughs, up the winding road that

leads to the summit of the hill. She looked at the hoary trees as if longing to wring from them those stories of the past of which their whisperings seem full; while every turn of the road conjured dramatic scenes and pictures before the imagination. She paid no heed while Russell and Travers talked of the storming of the hill by the American forces, in that war which the battle monument at its base describes as the "North American Invasion." Her manner seemed to say that such an event had no interest for her, save indeed to waken a sorrowful sympathy for the brave cadets of the Military Academy whose gallant death in resisting the assault this monument commemorates, and who lie upon their native soil "as does a hero on the shield he would not quit."

The carriage presently drew up on the broad platform of the summit, where the comrades of these youthful heroes still mount guard, and they entered the palace, which in its graceful beauty is one of the most charming habitations ever erected for the use and delight of man. For surely the architect was inspired who placed upon this precipitous rock those light and elegant arches that rise into the air with such exquisite effect, supporting the broad, marble-paved galleries upon which open rooms with delicately frescoed ceilings, and walls hung with softly-tinted satin. The whole creation is airy and graceful as a dream, with hanging gardens that lift the perfume of flowers and music of fountains high into the pure, clear air, and loggias frescoed in Pompeiian and Greek designs, from which one looks upon a view absolutely unsurpassed amid the loveliness of earth.

Directly below the craggy height, which drops from the castle terraces sheer and steep two hundred feet, are the shadowy aisles of the park where the great cypresses stand draped in their moss of centuries, while beyond the green valley spreads far and fair into apparently illimitable distance, dotted with remnants of ancient forests and scores of towns, each clustered around a picturesque church tower and embosomed in leafage, its great lakes gleaming in the sunlight, and its remote distance bounded by mountains which culminate on one side in the noble mass of Ajusco and eastward rise into the mighty majesty of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl. Tree-lined avenues and grey old aqueducts, picturesque as those of the Roman Campagna, stretch across the rich plain towards the city, which lies upon its surface like a brilliant jewel, in the multitude of its iridescent domes, its towers, and spires. Northward stands the rugged hill of Tepeyacac with the basilica of Guadalupe at its base, while farther away the waters of Lake Texcoco—those waters on which Cortes launched his brigantines against the Aztec city—spread gleaming to the misty horizon.

"I wonder," said Margaret Langdon musingly, "if the world can possibly show another picture so enchanting as this, so full of varied charm, so abounding in all the elements of beauty! One doubts it—for where else can one find a valley so vast and fair, set with such shining lakes, encircled by snow-capped mountains, and holding a city brilliant as Byzantium in its days of glory!"

“It is a marvellous picture," said Travers. “And yet it is only the culmination, the extreme expression of all that has delighted us in the country. For all those things which have united to make the land fascinating are here in superlative degree: natural beauty, romantic association, and the picturesque work of man."

"In other words," said Russell, "this is both naturally and historically the heart of Mexico, where it is only appropriate that beauty as well as interest should culminate."

"The history of Mexico certainly seems to centre here," observed Dorothea. "Was not some one saying the other day that this hill has from the earliest times been a contested point of great importance?"

"Don Rodolfo was saying so, I believe," answered Russell. "There is no doubt of the fact. The Aztecs on their first entrance into the valley possessed themselves of it at once and established themselves here while founding their city in the lake. They held it even after removing to Tenochtitlan, as it was greatly coveted by the neighbouring tribes, and built a causeway between it and the city, as well as an aqueduct to convey the water thither from its great spring. The aqueduct yonder "—he indicated the line of beautiful old arches below them— "follows the exact line of the ancient aqueduct, which, being cut by the Spaniards, deprived the beleaguered city of water."

' That beautiful spring at the foot of the hill has, then, always been the source of water-supply to the city?"

"Its chief source, yes. And there seems no good reason to doubt that this hill, with the ancient forest at its base, has always been a place of recreation, as well as a strong strategic point. The conquistadores state the fact, and, like Travers, I have a weakness for the testimony of eye-witnesses."

"What a view there must have been of Tenochtitlan from here!" said Dorothea dreamily, as leaning on the marble balustrade she looked out over the wonderful valley, which has been the theatre of such varied events through the long course of centuries. "Mexico yonder is beautiful— but think of Tenochtitlan! Fancy this green valley covered with the shining waters of the lakes, and in the midst the great capital of Anahuac rising in the glory of her white towers and pyramidal temples, 'like an Indian empress with her coronal of pearls' from the bosom of the waves!"

“While you are fancying," suggested Travers, "it would be well to complete the picture by imagining a scene of sacrifice on one of the pyramidal temples. The Spaniards, you know, from their position outside the city walls, saw their comrades who had been made prisoners carried to the summit of the great *teocalli*, extended on the stone of sacrifice and their hearts torn from their living bodies. That is an agreeable picture which sentimental deplorers of the fall of the Aztec city should not fail to contemplate."

“I am not a sentimental deplorer of the fall of Tenochtitlan," replied Dorothea with dignity. “I was only trying to imagine what its beauty must have been. There is no question of that."

“No one deplored the necessity of destroying that beauty more than Cortes," said Russell. “Like Titus before Jerusalem, he fairly pleaded with the obstinate defenders to spare their city and themselves. Again and again he offered the most honourable terms of capitulation, but, with the madness of people foredoomed to destruction, they would not listen to any terms. There is nothing more absurd," the speaker went on, "than the sympathy with the Aztecs to which we are treated so liberally by writers on Mexico, in view of the fact that they were themselves strangers and conquerors in the land, having driven before them the gentle and civilised Toltecs, and conquered by the most brutal and sanguinary methods the other native races. That their rule was odious to all whom they had reduced by force of arms is proved by the hatred and ferocity

displayed against them by the Tlascalans, a ferocity which Cortes was not always able to restrain."

“They were allies worth having, however, those brave Tlascalans," said Travers. "How staunchly they stood by Cortes after they had once promised him fidelity! Yes, it is a wonderful procession of shades of the past which one sees from this hill of Chapultepec! Indian princes, Spanish conquerors, the long train of the vanquished Aztecs withdrawing over the causeways from the ruined city they had defended in vain, a little group of brown-robed friars, with Pedro de Gante in their midst, coming yonder over the eastern bills to plant the cross above the fallen *teocalli*, glittering cavalcades prancing along the valley in attendance on the representatives of his Catholic Majesty, all the colour, light, movement of a picturesque age, alive with the flash of steel and waving of banners, and, as a final touch of romance and tragedy, the Emperor Maximilian, in his fair Austrian beauty, riding for the last time out of this stately castle, to march northward to Querétaro—and death."

"Ah, poor Carlotta!" murmured Margaret, in words which the sympathy of the world has echoed and re-echoed. “When one thinks of her, over yonder in her Belgian asylum, the shadow of tragedy grows so dark upon this fairy-like palace that its beauty becomes mournful. But sunset is approaching. Come, let us go to the roof."

Nothing can be conceived more charming than the garden which on the roof of the castle lifts the perfume of flowers, the music of fountains, and the feathery greenness of tropical trees and plants high into the pure, clear air—an enchanted pleasance of the sky. All possible suggestions of romance seem lurking in the beauty of this exquisite spot, this bower of delight, so elevated that no sound reaches it from below, but with all the wide glory of heaven arching above—of golden days and purple nights, throbbing with stars or magical with moonlight—and all the divinest beauty of earth spread beneath, to the uttermost verge of the valley's distant rim.

Dorothea's eyes were shining as she looked around when they came out upon the parapet-guarded space; but there was no time to utter any of the imaginations which thronged upon her, for now the crowning hour of the day had come, and as the sun sank in the west its reflected splendours began to gather about the luminous mountain-tops, above which masses of crimson and golden clouds were floating, and to cast upon the snowy crest of Popocatepetl and the long, shrouded form, of the White Lady a roseate radiance brief as beautiful. Exquisite were the tints with which the lesser mountains robed themselves, while the great city in the midst of the wide, green plain flashed back light from a thousand points, and the distant lakes shone as if on fire. The very atmosphere seemed turning to gold as the sunset glory bathed the whole picture and gave a touch of supreme enchantment to every detail —to the soft masses of foliage, the grey arches of the aqueducts, the embowered villages, the spreading fields. The little group standing on the castle roof above the frowning escarpments of the great rock could only look at each other with a glance which said that words were inadequate to express the sense of surpassing beauty thrilling through them like a divine intoxication.

When a little later they drove back towards the city, leaving reluctantly the fairy palace crowning the rugged steep, its arcades of delicate grace, its hanging gardens and stately tower outlined against the fading glory of the west, they encountered in the Paseo a sight which, had they not witnessed it before, would have appeared unaccountable. Night falls quickly in these latitudes, and, although a radiance from the dying sunset still lingered over the open plain

beyond and tinged with colour the floating clouds and solemn snow-peaks, a soft twilight already reigned under the leafy shades of the great avenue, and gleaming out upon this obscurity a myriad lights, like gigantic fire-flies, seemed making a playground of the end of the vista—moving rapidly, shining, disappearing, reappearing, forming a strange fantastic effect upon the background of deep, verdurous shadow. Had they been in any doubt, however, concerning the meaning of the illumination, a sound of rolling wheels and of horses' feet striking on the hard roadway, mingled with strains of music, as they drew nearer the great circle where arbitrary fashion has decreed that the afternoon *paseo* ends, would have explained it. For those dancing fire-flies were carriage lamps, and, although the custom peculiar to Mexico, of prolonging the fashionable drive until after nightfall strikes a new-comer as singular, it is impossible not to admire the fête-like appearance produced by a great number of equipages with gleaming lights driving back and forth along the broad avenue, with its line of mounted police in the centre, and its setting of foliage, statues, balustrades, and the stately villas that are springing up along its sides. Approached from the silent, deserted end towards Chapultepec, the effect of this throng of rapidly-moving lamps in the semi-twilight was picturesque in the extreme.

"It is like a carnival of lights," said Dorothea, as they, too, wheeled into line and with the rest of the world paused for a few moments in the *glorieta* to listen to the strains of the military band stationed there, and observe as far as was possible through the deepening dusk the inmates of the carriages surrounding them.

It was the next day that, in further celebration of the departure of Miss Graham into a more congenial sphere and their own consequent emancipation from her unsympathetic companionship, they made a deferred pilgrimage to the great national shrine of Guadalupe. Northward of the city, and two and a half miles from its gates, rises the abrupt and rocky height of Tepeyacac, the scene of the beautiful and touching miracle which during three centuries and a half has held so profound a place in Mexican hearts, so resistless an influence over Mexican lives. In palace and in hut alike throughout the wide land one finds the virginal yet queenly form, clothed in its sunlight garment, with gentle bending head and face wearing the tint of those for whose conversion the gracious miracle was wrought; but it is to Guadalupe that one must journey to find the original of this picture, impressed upon the *tilma* (blanket) of a poor Indian, by what process or vehicle the most sceptical have never been able to declare.

In times past the approach from the capital to this great shrine was worthy of its rank and dignity. The viceroy and Archbishop Don Fray Payo de Rivera caused to be constructed a magnificent causeway adorned by fifteen beautiful altar-like structures of stone, richly sculptured, disposed at regular intervals, and dedicated to the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, so that the pilgrims to Guadalupe telling their beads along the way could pause before each to say the appropriate prayer of the mystery. This noble work has been suffered to fall into shameful decay. Several of the beautiful altars have totally disappeared, the *glorieta* which adorned the middle of the way is in ruins, the arches of the picturesque bridges broken down, and —crowning vandalism!—the railway to Vera Cruz has been allowed to utilise the magnificent causeway for its track.

"Another striking example of the care the government bestows on works of historical antiquity and artistic value!" said Russell, as they drove by the once superb but now dishonoured way.

Meanwhile around them spread that fair valley with which they had grown so familiar, its seemingly boundless fields and white, dusty roads stretching to the distant line of blue mountains wrapped in the softest haze, while immediately before them rose the rugged and barren hill, evidently, like Chapultepec, of volcanic origin, with the town of Guadalupe at its base. In this town they paused before the collegiate* church of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe.

Noble and imposing in the extreme is this magnificent sanctuary, on which Mexico has lavished wealth almost beyond calculation in the past, and the entire interior of which is now in process of being remodelled and rebuilt in the most costly and splendid manner. When finally completed there will be few churches in the world to surpass it in beauty and magnificence. Though closed to ordinary visitors, the party were admitted through the courtesy of a gentleman in charge of the work, and were overwhelmed by the grandeur of design and execution which they found within. What massive pillars of carven stone were springing into wonderful arches high overhead, supporting the vast and lofty roof! In its strength and durability the work is like that of Titans—such work as the nineteenth century will hardly elsewhere leave to tell later ages what it has been. This great basilica of Guadalupe seems constructed to defy time, and to bear to other eras the message that so, in the last days of an age when faith seemed perishing from the face of the earth, Mexico gave her free and generous offerings to testify her unfading faith and ardent love.

"It will be a superb edifice when it is finished." said the general, looking at the great blocks of granite, apparently fit only for giants to handle, which strewed the floor, and on which the sculptors were busily engaged—their ringing chisels filling the air with a fine white dust; but years will be required for its completion."

"Undoubtedly," replied Russell. "They expect nothing else. The object of those who are building this church is not to finish it quickly, but to erect a temple worthy of the object for which it is built—a temple to serve in the fullest sense as a great national shrine."

"One would think they might have been satisfied with one that had cost the modest sum of more than a million dollars," Travers observed.

"No," Russell said, "they were not satisfied as long as anything was lacking to honour with the utmost splendour possible the Mother of God who, they believe with an unfaltering faith, appeared here to one of the poorest and humblest of their race, and left an enduring memorial of herself to console and animate their devotion."

"Let us go and see the picture," said Dorothea. "It has for me a charm which I cannot express."

It is in truth difficult to express the charm which this remarkable picture is endowed with, and which comes as a surprise to those who, knowing its history, expect to find it rude in design

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* A collegiate church is one which, though not the seat of a bishop, possesses a chapter of canons and all the organisation of a cathedral.

and crude in colour. So far from being either one or the other, it is in design, if a little formal, still, full of grace, tenderness, and dignity, while in colouring it is more harmonious than any copy represents it. Says a very competent art-critic:* "The picture, somewhat conventional in type, is good in drawing and still retains much strength of colouring. The material upon which it is painted is a coarse cloth woven of *ixtli* fibre. The medium cannot be determined. It does not seem to be distemper, water-colour, or oil-colour, though more suggestive of oil-colour than either of the others; and this fact of its lack of resemblance to the effects of the ordinary methods of painting is one of the strong practical points urged in favour of its miraculous origin. The picture has been examined twice, the glass covering being removed on these occasions, by Mexican painters of high standing, and on each occasion the method by which the picture was made has remained undetermined." So says a man of the world. But there is nothing undetermined in the method by which it was made to those who look up at it with adoring reverence, as it hangs above the votive offerings, and the ever-burning tapers that shed their soft light on the majestic yet benignant form, and the delicate face bending forward as if to hear and answer supplication.

"Was there ever a more poetical story than that of its origin?" said Margaret Langdon when they came out of the chapel where the picture finds a temporary shrine, and where the voice of prayer never ceases. “Even the story of Lourdes seems to me less beautiful and touching."

"And how delightfully picturesque all the details are!" said Dorothea. “How one can fancy the pious Indian coming over that rugged hill yonder early in the morning—no doubt it was very early, for the people of this country have a passion for rising betimes—and in the exquisite freshness of the dawn hearing the music of angels, and then beholding 'amid splendours' the Lady who bade him go to the bishop and tell him it was her will that on this spot a temple should be built. And then the roses—"

“But he did not gather the roses the first time that he saw the Lady," Mrs. Langdon suggested.

"No, but imagine his amazement when he was told to gather them on that barren spot, and when, looking around, he found them—such roses, be sure, as not even the *chinampas* could furnish!—and when, gathering them and carrying them to the bishop as commanded, he opened his *tilma* to find, instead of roses, the picture impressed upon it! I am certain there was never a lovelier miracle, one which seems as full of the sweetness of infinite tenderness and condescension as the miraculous flowers were of fragrance."

They all smiled at her manner of expression, but there was not one so dull of soul or fancy as not to be conscious of the lasting fragrance of those miraculous roses in this place. Through the lovely little garden in front of the now deserted convent of the Capuchins, they went to the Capilla del Pocito (the Chapel of the Holy Well), where gushes the spring said by tradition to mark the spot hallowed by Mary's feet. This elegant little building, with its exquisite dome of enamelled tiles, is altogether charming within and without. The well is in an ante-room of the chapel proper, and fills a large basin surrounded and covered with a grating of wrought-iron.

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* Thomas A. Janvier.

Through this grating the water can be dipped up, and, filling a cup, Russell held it out to his friends.

"Drink!" he said. "Whoever drinks of this water must return to Mexico, no matter how far he may wander, to drink again. If you have learned to love the bright land as well as I have, you will gladly take this means to insure yourself against a final farewell."

“It is like what the Romans tell one of the Fountain of Trevi," said Mrs. Langdon. “I, for one, drink gladly, for I have never seen a country I would be more grieved to think that I should never see again."

"We all drink with enthusiasm," said the general, "to Mexico, to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and to our return!"

Enthusiastically indeed this sentiment was drunk in the water of the holy spring; and then, after inspecting the lovely chapel, they set out to mount the stone stairway which leads to the summit of the hill, on whose barren, rocky crest Juan Diego met the gracious apparition and gathered the marvellous roses. On the line of this stairway, near the top of the hill, Russell pointed out a singular monument—the resemblance of a ship's mast and sails built in stone.

"The story told of this is curious," he said, "but there is no reason to doubt its truth. At some date unknown, for there is no inscription on the monument to tell, certain mariners ‘being in dire straits at sea, their ship tempest-tossed and rudderless, vowed that should Our Lady of Guadalupe save them, they would bring their ship's mast to her shrine and set it up there as a perpetual memorial of her protecting power; that immediately their ship came safe to Vera Cruz, and that the mariners loyally fulfilled their vow, carrying the mast with its yards upon their shoulders from Vera Cruz to the capital, and thence to this place, where they set it up and built around it, for protection from the weather, the covering of stone. And there,' concludes the chronicle, 'the mast is, even until this day.' "

"Could ever faith have been more practical and touching!" said Dorothea, as they all paused to look at this unique monument, and think of the weather-stained timbers which had so often heard the howl of the tempest and felt the fierce shock of the waves, but that had now such safe anchorage on this sacred hill—type, let us hope, of the pious hearts that so loyally fulfilled their vow.

The stairway ends upon the summit on a platform before a small chapel. This platform, guarded by a stone parapet which bounds the steep descent of the precipitous hill, commands a view second only in extent and beauty to that of Chapultepec, and very like it in character. As the immense plain burst upon the vision of the breathless climbers, in all its glory of boundless extent and opalescent colour, they paused involuntarily to take in with a sense of rapture its exceeding loveliness. Immediately in front, but much below them, rose the vast roof, dome, and cross-crowned towers of the great church—the town of Guadalupe nestling around it, and the delicate cupola of the Holy Well glittering in the sunlight—while stretching on and on, far as the gaze could sweep, the emerald valley was bounded on the horizon verge by heaven-tinted azure heights, and gemmed in the middle distance by silver-gleaming lakes and the resplendent domes and towers of the Oriental-like city that lay basking beneath the deep blue dazzling sky.

It was Margaret Langdon who, after they had looked long in silence, turned to Russell. "You said the other day that Chapultepec is the heart of Mexico," she observed in her clear, sweet voice. "But it seems to me that the spot where the past and the present life of Mexico most

truly meet, where all the forces that go to make the country most truly find a centre, is here on this hill of Tepeyacac. And so here is the true Heart of Mexico."

As it might truly be said that the old and the new life of Mexico met on the Hill of Tepeyacac, so it was with a sense of tracing the old life back to its source to the dim days when Toltec and Aztec disputed mastery in the land that the party spent one day on that strange survival of old Mexico, the Canal of La Viga. It was a day to which Dorothea had looked forward with a peculiar sense of interest and anticipation, for had not Russell told her that although the floating gardens no longer floated, the life lived among and upon them was still identically the same as in the days before the Conquest, and that she might dream that Tenochtitlan still lay like Venice upon its shining waters, as her boat glided through these flowery *chinampas*? She was therefore in buoyant spirits and ready to be charmed when, in the crisp freshness of a glorious morning, they stood upon the banks of the canal, which is in reality not a canal at all, but a navigable sluice through which the waters of the lakes Xochimilco and Chalco discharge into the lower level of Lake Texcoco. Half a dozen boats—a species of primitive gondola, flat-bottomed affairs, roofed except at bow and stern, with cotton curtains at the sides, and benches covered with bright calico running fore and aft— lay awaiting customers, their white-clad, red-cinctured boatmen with dark, delicate faces under the broad *sombreros*, looking an artistically worthy substitute for the Venetian gondolier. A clamorous bargain was soon concluded, terms agreed upon at a reduction of two thirds from those asked, and the party embarked in one of the clean, well-scrubbed boats which the boatman propels by a pole in the bow.

Passing under the low stone arches of the Garita de la Viga, the beautiful vista of the canal opened before them—glassy water below, green in the shadow of the trees that line each side and almost join their boughs across, old stone walls rising like fortifications from the edges here and there, wonderful turquoise sky above, and boats laden to their edges with vegetables and flowers, moving over the mirroring surface towards the city. Along the side of the canal runs a *paseo*, once the resort of fashion but now deserted by that fickle power, yet none the less charmingly beautiful. The wide, smooth drive is bordered by noble shade-trees, on one side is the picturesque canal with all the morning animated life upon its surface, on the other far-stretching fields of richest green that seem but yesterday to have been reclaimed from the waters that once covered them, while bounding the fair prospect the great mountains stand in the clear light like masses of hewn sapphire.

"This," said Dorothea, watching with delighted eyes the canoes that passed them laden from stem to stern with bright-tinted blossoms, "is the most uniquely picturesque scene we have beheld in Mexico."

"I wish," said Russell, "that it was possible for you to see it at the time of the *Paseo de las Flores*, or Feast of the Flowers, which occurs here once a year. How much it has fallen into disuse I do not know, for I saw it when I first entered the country; but the modern fashionable Flower Carnival on the Paseo de la Reforma is a poor affair compared with the ancient celebration of the people here—a celebration which had its origin in remote antiquity. Fancy this canal absolutely filled with boats so decorated with flowers that, reflected in the glassy water, they seemed simply floating masses of brilliant blossoms, their occupants also decorated and crowned with flowers of the most gorgeous hues! On the grassy banks sat girls surrounded by

heaps of blossoms—roses, lilies, geraniums, poppies, every flower that blooms, it seemed, and all of the most exquisite freshness and beauty—which they wove unceasingly into garlands, wreaths, bouquets, that were at once purchased by the throngs of people filling the *paseo*. For all the world of fashion comes to the Viga on that day, and the broad drive yonder was crowded with carriages, the very horses of which were garlanded with flowers. It was without exception the most picturesquely beautiful carnival I have ever seen in any country. Flowers were tossed from one to another until the whole air seemed full of fragrance, music was playing—"

But here Dorothea lifted her hands in protest. “Oh, pray, hush!" she entreated. "You make me so envious! I want to see it all with my own eyes. Papa, we must stay in Mexico for the Paseo de las Flores!"

“Must we?" said the general placidly. "But when does this event take place?"

“I saw it on Thursday of Easter week," said Russell. "It is a far cry from Christmas—which we celebrated the other day—to Easter," said Dorothea with a sigh. "Meanwhile, where are the floating gardens?”

“We shall very soon come to them," Russell replied. “But you must not expect to find them still floating. Do you remember Lake Chapala, and how we saw there the process of the creation of land from the aquatic plant to the formation of solid soil?"

“How would it be possible to forget anything so peculiar and so interesting?" said Mrs. Langdon. "I remember also that you remarked at the time that what we saw at one stage were veritable *chinampas*, or floating gardens."

"Exactly," said Russell, "and through just such a process of gradual growth and accumulation these chinampas of Lake Xochimilco have passed. A little while ago the accumulated soil still floated on the water like that which we saw in Lake Chapala, but it is now anchored, although still so much a part of the lake on which it lies that one is inclined to believe a touch would float it still."

There was no difficulty, indeed, in believing that the green masses of vegetation which they presently reached had very recently floated on the water that hardly yet relinquished its sovereignty over them. To see the *chinampas* well, and comprehend how little exaggeration there was in this part of the descriptions of ancient Mexico, it is necessary to disembark at Santa Anita— a pretty place made up of straw-thatched houses gathered about a quaint old church with a fine tower—and there take a canoe narrow enough to be propelled along the almost invisible water-ways that divide the gardens which spread in green beauty far as the eye can reach. Here are grown the flowers and vegetables for the city market; and as the soil is of an incredible fertility, and produces in abundance everything planted upon it, the result is such a marvellous growth and bloom as might well distract with envy the less-favoured market-gardeners of the world.

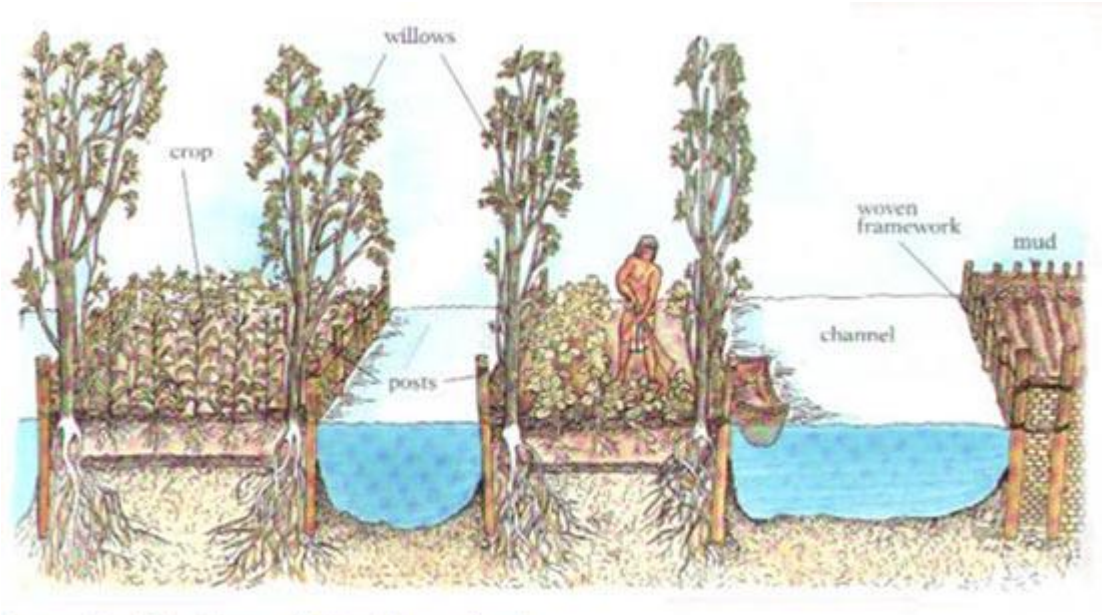
"Market gardens!" said Dorothea indignantly, in response to a remark of the kind. "How can one think of anything so prosaic in connection with this poetical spot? It is a paradise of flowers—"

"Not to speak of lettuce and pease and radishes," said her father.

"And how could anything be more pastoral and charming than these tiny dwellings, built of cane and covered with roses!” the enthusiast continued. "Talk of ancient Mexico—here it is before our eyes! Except for the fact that they no longer float, I am sure the picture which these

chinampas present, and the existence of the people upon them, has not changed since the Spaniards first looked upon Tenochtitlan."

"We are assured of that," said Russell, "by the testimony of Cortes himself. When in Tenochtitlan as the guest of Montezuma he walked along the banks of the canal, which existed as we see it to-day, and described just such a scene as we have witnessed—the throng of laden boats carrying the produce of the *chinampas* to market."



Cross-section of the *chinampas* (Midwest Permaculture).

“They look," said Travers, regarding the gardens with a critical glance, "as if one strong push might very readily set them to floating again."

“How do you suppose they are anchored?" asked the general, probing one with his stick as if anxious to test Travers's suggestion.

“The water is not very deep," replied Russell, "and, after a tract for cultivation has been prepared by placing a sufficient quantity of earth and turf on some floating mass of reeds and water-plants, long willow poles are driven through it to the bottom of the lake, where they soon take root, and so anchor the garden firmly."

"But the water continues to flow underneath?"

"On Lake Xochimilco—which is covered with this kind of vegetation—undoubtedly. Whether it is the case here or not I cannot say, for these *chinampas* are, I fancy, of older date."

"To think," said Dorothea, looking dreamily at a wonderful mass of verdure which they were in the act of passing, "that the process of manufacturing *chinampas* should still be going on, and that, since the water flows under them, they might float if they would!"

So they drifted farther and farther through this enchanted region, where it seemed difficult to determine what was land and what was water, as their canoe pushed its way through the broad green leaves of water-lilies, past hedges formed of roses, all in bloom and filling the air with their rich fragrance, and by the straw-thatched, verdure-embowered, flower-draped huts which form not the least interesting part of this wonderful semi-aqueous world of greenness and bloom and beauty.

Returning at length to the canal, they resumed their journey upon it, and space fails in which to describe the charm of the long hours of this dreamlike day, in which they floated on the emerald-shadowed water, enraptured by the lovely vista of bending trees and shining current opening continually before their eyes, by the views across the wide valley, of mountains in whose deep gorges amethyst and lilac shadows rested while their great shoulders and crests were palely blue in the excess of dazzling light which clothed them, and by the quaint old towns and picturesque bridges which they passed. Had Dorothea been in charge of the expedition, there would have been no pause until they had reached and crossed Lake Xochimilco; but when the general learned that to do so would necessitate spending the night at the town of the same name upon the lake, where it was to be supposed that only the most doubtful and primitive accommodation could be found, he decided that Russell's recommendation of returning from Mexicalcingo should be followed. It was at this place, where they stopped for lunch, that Dorothea confided to Travers her opinion that parties were always a mistake.

"Always," she said, with a rankling remembrance of Lake Xochimilco, "there is some one who wants to turn back, who never wishes to see all that is to be seen, who is afraid of fatigue, of difficulties, of lack of eating and drinking forsooth!"

“Peace, unquiet spirit!" said Mrs. Langdon, who overheard her, turning round with a smile. "When have you ever wished to turn back; what point so far that you had no desire to go farther, has ever been reached? If we went to Xochimilco with you, would you be satisfied? No, there would be some yet farther goal to which you would turn your regard as wistfully as you turn it to the lake now. You are impossible to satisfy, and it is necessary to suppress you promptly and severely; so be still!"

"All the same, I am going to Xochimilco another day," said Dorothea, rebellious and unappeased.

“There is one place in this neighbourhood," said Travers, "which I do not think we ought to turn back without seeing, and that is the *Cerro de la Estrella*, or Hill of the Star. Don't you remember the description of the Festival of Fire which took place there at the end of every Aztec cycle? Talk of a festival—that would have been worth seeing! Fancy the procession of priests that in the evening, when the constellation of the Pleiades approached the zenith, went forth to that hill leading a noble victim, a captive of the highest rank, to be sacrificed! Except to the victim, it must have been a wonderful sight, and picturesque in the extreme."

Cholula

“What did they do after reaching there?" asked the general.

“Well, it seems that for several days previous all the fires in the temples and even in the dwellings of the people had been extinguished, for at the end of each cycle the Aztecs expected the world to come to an end "

"I wonder if that can be so?" interposed Dorothea skeptically. “How would any idea of the possible ending of the world have occurred to them? They had heard no prophecy to that effect, and they certainly saw nothing in Nature to suggest it."

“However that may have been," proceeded Travers, "the events in question occurred as I relate. On the night of the celebration, after the Pleiades had passed the zenith, the victim—poor fellow, one feels for him even yet!—was slaughtered, and a new fire was kindled upon his breast. Couriers stood ready with torches, which were lighted at this fire and conveyed throughout the country. Feasting and rejoicing then took place, and it must altogether have been a very imposing and striking occasion, which, occurring only once in fifty-two years, nobody could hope to witness twice."

“And we are near the scene of it!" said Dorothea. "I certainly think we should see it—the hill, I mean."

“I really don't think," said Russell, "that it would repay you to do so. All traces of the temple have been destroyed, and you would see only an isolated hill, crowned by a cross, the ascent of which is difficult and fatiguing. For the most authentic and accessible remains of the worship of ancient Mexico, let me suggest that it is best to go to the National Museum, which as yet you have not visited."

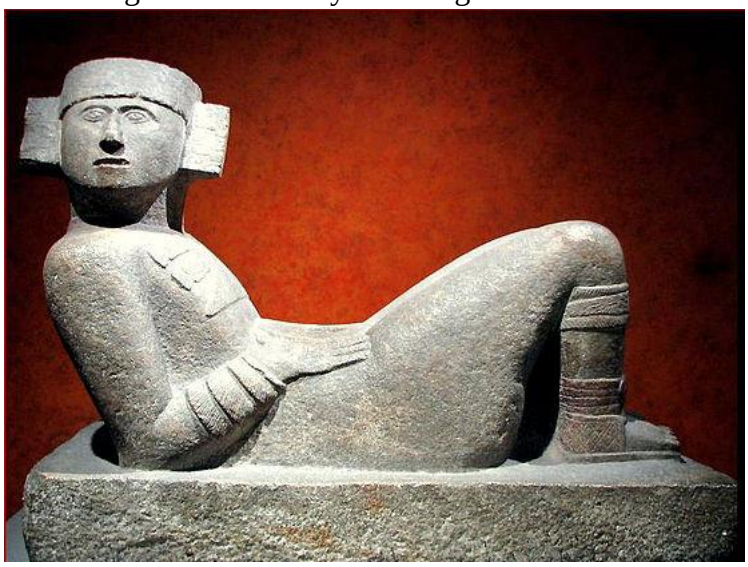
"I dislike museums!" said Dorothea petulantly. "Ancient relics lose their interest when they are torn from their surroundings, placed in a hall, and ticketed. Who would care for the Sphinx if it were taken away from the desert and the Pyramids? But I suppose I must go to the museum. Up to this time I have not been in a frame of mind to take interest in primitive Mexico. I needed to adjust my mental attitude, after having been steeped in an atmosphere so different. As a matter of fact and proper precedence, we should have commenced with the Aztecs; but, instead of that, my imagination became at once filled with conquistadores, monks, hidalgos, and all the romance and splendour of New Spain. But tomorrow I shall certainly go and see the ancient gods."

They were at this time walking through the melancholy streets of Mexicalcingo—a town of importance at the time of the Conquest, but dwindled now to a place of two or three hundred inhabitants only. Even these two or three hundred seemed to have abandoned the little hamlet on this particular day, since the wandering strangers only saw a dozen or so, counting children and dogs, who evinced but an indifferent curiosity regarding them. Presently they found themselves in a sad and lonely spot. A large old church, tightly closed, as if deserted, seemed to stand as a relic of more prosperous times, with a forsaken air inexpressibly mournful. Beside it were the crumbling ruins of an ancient monastery, and scattered over the large open space before it were several trees so vast of girth and broad of crown, so rugged, gnarled, and mighty, that it was evident to the merest glance that they were survivors of a primitive world—that strange, wild, half-mythical Aztec world which this day's journeying amid green and flowery water-ways had seemed to bring so close.

It seemed closer yet when they stood the next morning in that great cool hall, opening from the flowery court, where the gods of old Mexico sit in silent and solemn state, grouped around the sacrificial stone which once flowed so redly with human blood. Russell pointed out the effigy of the sun carved upon the upper surface of this stone, indicating that the work as a whole was a votive offering to that deity. "It is," he said, "little understood how far the ancient Aztec worship was a worship of the sun. This great stone, for example, erroneously called the Calendar Stone"—he walked over to it as he spoke—"has been conclusively proved by archaeological research to be the Stone of the Sun, which was originally placed on one of the artificial mounds in the centre of Tenochtitlan, where it served as the base of the smaller, perforated stone to which the victim was tied, and upon the two stones the gladiatorial sacrifice was performed."

“A sanguinary relic to have been placed in the foundations of a Christian church," said the general, remembering the inscription on the southern wall of the cathedral, saying that thence the so-called Calendar Stone had been removed.

"Its purpose was not understood when it was built into the cathedral wall, nor for a long time after," said Russell. "But, as the Stone of the Sun, it is of all the relics of ancient Mexico the most distinctive. And perhaps the most interesting is this statue," he went on, leading them towards the famous recumbent figure exhumed by Le Plongeon in Yucatan.



“It was at first supposed to be a personal monument, and was given the name of Chac-Mool; but that theory seems entirely upset by the fact that no less than three similar figures have been discovered in different parts of Mexico. It is evidently an idol or symbol of the widest significance, and I agree with the learned archaeologist, Señor Chavero, who believes it to be the God of Fire, and that the disk held in his hands is the emblem of the sun."

“Our humorous Mexican Guide remarks that 'very bitter controversies have raged and are still raging over the upturned stomach of this defenceless stone image,'" said Travers. "But I am on the side of Señor Chavero. The God of Fire is a much more imposing personality than Chac-Mool, of no particular distinction at all, and I have no doubt that this is the personage in whose honour the Festival of Fire at the Hill of the Star took place."

“My favourite," said Dorothea, "is the curiously misnamed *Indio Tristo*. So far from being sad, he is the merriest little Indian ever put into stone, I am sure."

Thus they wandered in fact and imagination through this strange, silent prehistoric world, which suggests so much and tells so little of the ancient life of the country, with its shadowy traditions of remote antiquity, its monuments whose story no man can read, and its sanguinary worship which sentimental writers inveigh against the Spanish conquerors for sweeping away. "Spain has the unenviable credit of having destroyed two great civilisations," says one of these writers, who has presumably stood before the Sacrificial Stone, which still seems to the fancy crimson with the blood of the thousands of human victims slain upon it, and thence has stepped into the sunlight to see the Cross gleaming on the great cathedral towers above the spot where that accursed stone once stood, but who to the symbol of redemption would prefer the God of Fire in Mexico, as the Crescent in Granada.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CITY OF THE ANGELS.

"'In the year of our Lord 1529 came to Tlascala the illustrious Fray Julian Garcés, the first consecrated bishop of the Catholic Church whose feet, shod with Pontifical holiness, ever trod in this heathen Edom. Even before his coming the project had been mooted of founding somewhere in these parts a town that might be a resting-place in the long and weary walk from the coast to the City of Mexico. With this project the new bishop was in hearty accord; yet was he uncertain in his mind as to where best might be placed the new town.

"'As all know, it oftentimes happens that one dreams in the night of those things of which one thinks most by day. Thus it was that one night this venerable gentleman, being retired to the humble bed upon which he took his scanty rest, dreamed a prophetic dream. In his vision, while his spirit was controlled by a superior power, he beheld a most beautiful plain (*hermosissima vega*) bounded by the great slope of the volcanoes westward, broken by two little hills a league asunder, dotted by many springs, and cut by two rivers which gave abundant water and made all things fresh and green. And as he gazed, in pleased amazement, at this charming place, lo! He saw two angels who with line and rod measured bounds and distances upon the ground—as do those who plan the founding of great buildings and mark where shall be wide streets and open squares. And having beheld this vision, the bishop awoke.

"'Straightway he set himself, that very hour, to search for the site that, as his vision had shown him, was chosen of the angels. And as he walked, being, no doubt, divinely ordered in his goings, he came to the very plain that he had seen in his dream. Then gladly he exclaimed: "This is the site that the Lord has chosen through His holy angels; and here, to His glory, shall the city be." ' "

"A most poetical and edifying history," said Travers, closing the book from which he had been reading these words of the ancient chronicler, Fray Juan Villa Sanchez, "and a foundation

of which any city might well be proud. Meanwhile, has any one observed what a very rich and beautiful country this is upon which we have entered, now that the mountain divide is passed?"

"Do you think we are blind?" asked the general. "It is the most fertile and highly cultivated country we have yet seen, with the possible exception of the Bajio."

“It is not even excelled by the Bajio," said Russell. “This plain of Puebla is at once one of the most beautiful and the most productive in all Mexico. Even in the primitive days it was renowned for the fruitfulness of its soil. Cortes, who left nothing untold in his letters to the emperor, remarked that there was not a rood of the land but what was under cultivation, and the system of irrigating now in use seems to be exactly the same as in those days."

"It is a perfect garden of fertility," said the general, as the train swept onward through the richly spreading lands that extend for leagues on each side of the track.

It is truly a garden in its beauty, this lovely valley of Puebla, which delights our eyes to-day, as it delighted those of the Spanish soldiers when they first marched through its rich champaign four centuries ago. Absolutely inexhaustible in productiveness, the vast haciendas with their luxuriant crops extend far as the eye can reach, set with groups of walled buildings to which lines of noble trees stretch across the green country in stately avenues, and round which cluster embosoming woods and groves. Beautiful church towers rise above the half-hidden roofs of villages, picturesque stone bridges span the streams that water the fields, while, like guardian spirits brooding above this Arcadia of pastoral loveliness, stand the mighty forms of Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, more impressive than when viewed from the valley of Mexico, because nearer and seen without intervening foot-hills.

"I should not object to owning one of these haciendas," added the general meditatively. "They must be enormously productive."

“I should as soon think of owning so many square leagues of Paradise," said Dorothea. "It seems to me that this valley is too beautiful to exist except in a dream."

“There is nothing dream-like about the profits of these lands," said Russell. "They are so great that one can readily credit the accounts which the Spanish conquerors give of the wealth and prosperity of Cholula, which they describe as at that time the commercial capital of the country, as well as its religious centre."

“Are we near Cholula?" asked Mrs. Langdon.

"Yes, quite near—you will soon have a very fine view of it across the valley on the right."

But so many and so beautiful were the pictures opening in constant succession around them, as they journeyed onward, that they had almost forgotten Russell's assurance, when pointing suddenly, he said, "Cholula!" and there—beheld with great distinctness across the wide

expanse of level plain—rose, like an abrupt, natural height, that great hill or pyramid which is a monument of such remote antiquity that no man can declare who were its builders; while spreading around its base were the dwellings and churches of the modern town which has taken the place of the populous ancient city, and which, though shrunken in size and importance, still presents, from a distance at least, a fair and sufficiently imposing aspect to recall that holy city into which the bold Spaniards entered, lost in wonder and admiration at the wealth and civilisation it displayed.

“Oh, yes, we can easily make an excursion there from Puebla," said Russell, in reply to a question. “In fact, such a visit should on no account be omitted. And now we shall in a few minutes find ourselves in the City of the Angels. I suppose, by-the-bye, you are aware that the angels have become discredited patrons in Mexico, and that the official name of the city is now Puebla de Zaragoza, in honour of the general who commanded the Mexican forces in the battle of the Fifth of May, which took place there."

Dorothea made a gesture of disgust. “I decline to recognise any such name," she said. “Puebla de los Angeles the city was for three and a half centuries, and Puebla de los Angeles it will, I am sure, remain to the end of its existence."

“And really," said the general practically, “I don't see why the battle at Puebla on the Fifth of May should be considered worthy of such glorification. It was simply a repulse of the French—the Mexicans holding a strongly intrenched position. Four thousand men behind fortifications might readily repulse six thousand as an attacking force. To make such an event a national anniversary leads one to think that the Mexicans did not have at that time a great many victories to celebrate."

“The capture of the city five years later by General Porfirio Diaz was certainly a much more brilliant affair and better deserves celebration," said Russell. “But here we are in Puebla."

Even in their first short drive through the city the travellers were able to perceive something of the charm which has made Puebla de los Angeles famous. But their glimpses of narrow *calles*, of a miraculous cleanliness, lined by tall old tiled houses, of churches rich with colour, of glistening domes, of *portales* and gardens, were only enough to whet the appetite for more—since the love of the picturesque, like all other loves, grows with what it feeds upon—when they drew up before the entrance of the Hotel Diligencias, destined to remain in their memories as a perfect example of the great hostelries of the past, untouched, like all else in Puebla, by the destroyer called modern progress. The spacious court into which they entered seemed to be waiting for the great *diligencias* to roll in on their way from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico, or for some group of *caballeros* with their armed attendants—for were not brigands lurking in all the mountain passes?—to ride under the great arch of entrance, with jingling of spurs and swords, making the patio alive with the glitter of their caparisons and the sound of their voices. A broad flight of stone steps led to the upper story, where corridors of a singular picturesqueness even for Mexican corridors stretched in long vista, with pots of dark-blue pottery containing shrubs and flowering plants placed on their balustrades, hanging baskets filled with trailing vines suspended from their low, broad arches, and the wide expanse of their tile-paved floors, on which opened the doors of spacious and pleasant chambers, as scrupulously clean as such floors invariably are in Mexico. On one side of the court the corridor, its arches filled in with glass, formed a picturesque dining-room.

"Why is this necessary?" asked the general, indicating the sashes—then partly open—as they sat down to dinner. “In Guadalajara and many other places we have dined, supped, and breakfasted on the corridors without any such protection."

"We are in a different climate here," replied Russell. "Puebla is nearly as high as the City of Mexico— being more than seven thousand feet above the sea—and much colder, since it is nearer the snow-covered mountains, from which icy winds sweep down. At night you will perceive the necessity of this protection."

"Happily it is not yet night," said Dorothea, looking through the open arches up into the deep sapphire heart of the sky shining down into the old, peaceful court. “We have a whole afternoon before us to fill with glowing pictures, in which it is plain that Puebla abounds. I am enamoured of the city already—of its quaint and perfect picturesqueness."

"That is not surprising." said Russell. "There is hardly a modern feature about it. Delightful as all Mexican cities are, this is perhaps the most delightful of all in its appearance of an ancient city of Spain set down in one of the fairest valleys of the New World."

"I believe," said the general, "that it has the finest cathedral in Mexico."

"In some respects, yes," Russell replied. "In others—but you shall judge for yourself. It is at least the most magnificent."

And when, a little later, they set forth to view this fair City of the Angels, they found it all that Russell had said, more rich, indeed, in that attraction which is mingled of past and present—in which beauty that delights the eye derives new charm and value from those deep sources of human history and tradition in which it has had its rise, and with which it is associated—than words can readily express. At every step along the streets, where the façades of the houses are set with glazed tiles and their court-yards glistening with the same decoration; where church -towers, richly sculptured, rise against the dazzling sky, or the Byzantine mass of some grand old sanctuary is so beautiful in time-mellowed colour, incrusted with the tile-work for which Puebla is famous, and the exquisite marbles that bear its name throughout the world, and so full of the grace of Oriental architecture that to match it out of Spain, Venice, or the East would be impossible; where the Moorish *portales* are full of pictures to enrapture an artist; and where with every step there is a constantly deepening sense of delight in the Old World spell that speaks in everything. For these are the streets of Granada, but with the sky of Mexico burning like a blue jewel above, and the dark, graceful people, whose arts and civilisation astonished the conquistadores, passing to and fro in their bright draperies through shadowy arcades and under the spreading trees of the green plazas, across spaces filled with a white glare of blinding sunshine and into the dim aisles of the ancient churches.

Among these churches the great cathedral, of which Puebla has such good reason to be proud, stands unsurpassed in grandeur of design and magnificence of decoration. More fortunate than the Cathedral of Mexico, it is elevated upon a wide platform, which gives to its fine architecture a proper dignity of setting. Massive and stately, its mighty walls, supported by immense buttresses, have the solidity of a mediaeval fortress, while its great west front, enriched by basso-relievos of white marble, set in the dark stone of which it is built, and crowned by the noble towers, rises with an incomparably majestic effect above its broad, paved atrium.

But in contrast to the severity of its outward style, the splendour of its interior decoration fairly burns upon the vision. Of proportions nearly as vast as the Cathedral of Mexico, it is

infinitely more ornate in detail. Lined on one side by massive columns that support the lofty roof, and on the other by chapels, the gates of which are formed of iron gratings wrought two hundred years ago by the master Mateo de la Cruz, and in a late renovation of the church richly gilded, the wide aisles, with their pavement of coloured marbles, offer superb vistas to the eye. Here, as in Mexico, the choir, in Spanish fashion, occupies the centre of the lofty nave. It is of stone, closed towards the high altar by swinging gates of the same beautifully wrought and gilded iron as those of the chapels, but the side entrances are through doors of dark, carved wood. The interior is a marvel of marquetry-work and sculpture. The two great organs are enclosed in richly-carved cases and adorned by golden figures of angels blowing trumpets, while the stalls, desks, and music-stands—especially that surmounted by a figure of San Juan Nepomuceno—are examples of the most exquisite inlaying, the work of the master Pedro Muños, whose name and the dates when he began and completed his work—1719-1722—are to be seen inlaid on the stalls. The outer walls are hung with paintings, many of them by famous hands, of which the Apparition of Nuestra Señora de la Merced to San Raymundo de Peñafort is especially notable as an admirable work of art. The beautiful high altar, under its soaring dome, was designed by Manuel Tolsa, and is composed of a great variety of Mexican marbles, with the lovely onyx of Puebla predominating, while the graceful figure of the Purissima crowning the tabernacle, as well as the other decorative figures, are also from his designs. In the chapels are a multitude of details to enrapture the artistic sense—exquisite old altars of carved and gilded wood, set with paintings, admirably sculptured figures, frescoed domes, marble tombs and silver urns containing the relics of saints.

The sacristy of this magnificent temple is in harmony with the rest of its stately splendour—a spacious and lofty apartment, lined by chests of drawers of dark, carved wood for the vestments, above which the walls are covered with paintings. Two finely-carved tables have for their tops large slabs of onyx, and wrought of onyx also is the lavatory against the east wall. It was here that the party met with an incident totally new to their experience in Mexico.

Russell had remarked that they must see the chapter-room. "It is," he said, "one of the finest apartments conceivable, and its walls are hung with Flemish tapestry presented to the cathedral by the Emperor Charles V. Yonder is a sacristan. I'll ask his permission to enter."

He approached the person alluded to, who, standing by one of the chests of drawers, was, as he had said, evidently a sacristan. The request was made, but, instead of the instant and courteous acquiescence to which they were so accustomed that it was always taken for granted, Russell (to his own great surprise) was plainly met by a refusal. There was a short argument, but the sacristan remained firm, and after a minute Russell, turning abruptly, came back to the expectant party.

"I have been in Mexico for years," he said, “and I have to record to-day the first instance of rudeness which I have encountered in the country. That man refuses to allow us to see the *sala capitular*."

"Impossible!" cried Dorothea incredulously. "Such discourtesy is unheard of—in Mexico! What does he mean? What reason does he give for such conduct?"

“He says," replied Russell, "and his manner of saying it was very surly, that the canons have given orders that no Americans are to be admitted hereafter to the room."

“So it is not even a general prohibition," said Travers, "but directed specially against Americans. Very courteous on the part of the canons, one must declare!"

“Interrogated," Russell went on, "with regard to the cause of such a special prohibition, he replied that Americans had so repeatedly conducted themselves there with a gross lack of decorum that the canons had ordered the apartment to be closed to them."

“What do you suppose they did? " asked Dorothea in an awed voice. "It must have been something very dreadful."

“Perhaps they took liberties with the Flemish tapestry," suggested Travers. "Tried, perhaps, to carry off some fragments of it. One can't imagine anything else of a sufficiently heinous nature to call forth such a prohibition, especially since I never heard that there was any very sacred character about a chapter-room. One would think that if the church was open to the irreverent persons in question, the *sala capitular* need not be closed."

“There is the difference," said Mrs. Langdon, "that the church cannot be closed. It must remain open for the use of the people, and therefore is, as it were, at the mercy of that class of Americans who, if they possess any manners elsewhere, leave them behind at the threshold of a Catholic church, especially in a foreign country. But the chapter-room is the private apartment of the canons; and they have a right to close it to any portion of the public who have not appreciated the privilege of entrance."

"For all that," said Dorothea, "I feel that we have encountered a very rude, and, for *us*, very undeserved repulse."

"It is the law of life, my dear, that the innocent should suffer for the sins of the guilty," remarked the general philosophically.

"Think of the scenes we have ourselves witnessed!" added Mrs. Langdon. "Remember the American woman who pushed her way through the kneeling throng in the chapel of Guadalupe while Mass was in progress, and stood before the altar-rail scanning the picture through an eye-glass while the priest was in the very act of elevating the Sacred Host."

"I remember well," said Dorothea, "that I should have liked to take her by the shoulders and put her out, and I wondered some official of the church did not do so."

"Exactly," said Travers. "Therefore you may understand the spirit of just indignation which manifests itself by closing the doors of the famous chapter-room of the Cathedral of Puebla to all Americans."

But even on the reasonable spirits which acknowledged the justice of this rebuke to those who (like their countrymen, both of America and England, in Europe) wander through Mexican churches displaying an irreverence and disregard for the most sacred places which they would not for a moment tolerate in their own houses of worship at home, this incident could not but have an unpleasant effect. To suffer for the transgressions of others, however indisputable those transgressions may have been, is never agreeable to human nature. To have a door closed in one's face is apt to send the blood rather hotly to that face, and to be denied the sight of some object or place is to enhance the desire for such gratification. So, to Dorothea especially, the glories of the great church were a little dimmed, as they passed again through its superb space. It was Mrs. Langdon who, pausing as they approached the great western doors and looking back along the perspective of the splendid aisle, said:

"Can one find anything to equal that, in majesty of effect and richness of decoration, unless it be in some of the great cathedrals of Spain? But none of them, I am sure—not Burgos, not Toledo, not Seville—can surpass it in beauty or in magnificence."

“It is incomparably magnificent," said Travers, "whether one regards it in general or in detail. These beautiful wrought and gilded gratings, the carvings, the paintings, the infinite richness of the altars, the chapels and the *coro*, the splendour of colour everywhere—it would be incredible if it were not before one's eyes!"

“I prefer the Cathedral of Mexico," said Dorothea as they passed out. "No, you need not smile, Margaret, as if you fancied I say so on account of the chapter-room incident! I really prefer it. This is magnificent; but I like better the severer style, the vaster space, the more harmoniously toned richness of the great cathedral in Mexico. It is, to me, more impressive. Its dim, solemn grandeur is more imposing to the imagination than all these gorgeous splendours."

"Are you quite sure that your opinion is altogether unbiassed by the chapter-room incident?" asked her father.

"Quite sure," with decision. "But it is impossible not to compare this surly sacristan of Puebla with the delightful sacristan of the Cathedral of Mexico, who did not need to be asked for permission to go here or there, but as soon as we accosted him insisted upon taking us everywhere. Don't you remember how he carried us into the *coro* and showed us the quaint old music-books, and up into the tribunes by the organs, and into the chapter-rooms and sacristies, and how he would not let us off even from the roof, but, tucking up his velvet gown, carried us outside, and thence to the towers?"

“He was most obliging," said Mrs. Langdon, “as indeed every sacristan, or other official, in Mexico so far has been."

"Then think of that charming man in the Cathedral of Guadalajara!" proceeded Dorothea, rehearsing her memories. “How pleased he was to take us into the chapter-room to see the great Murillo—that divine picture which I am sure is much finer than anything they can possibly have in their chapter-room here!—and how, without any solicitation, he showed us all the treasures of vestments and vessels—such embroideries, such jewelled goldsmith's work!—and even opened for us those marvellous old coffers, or whatever they would be called, which contain the strangely preserved bodies of those ancient bishops, about one of whom such an interesting and poetical legend is told."

“The bishop who died away from home while travelling, and whose mule, unguided, brought his body back and knocked with his fore feet at night at the cathedral door," said Travers. "I remember the story well—perhaps because the sacristan told it to us while he held open the lid of the carved old chest in which the bishop reposed before our eyes!"

“Yes," said Dorothea, "it was all most interesting, most picturesque: and a uniform experience of such courtesy has sadly unfitted us to appreciate the Pueblan standard of that quality."

"We must efface the memory of the chapter-room by taking you somewhere else," said Russell, holding up his hand to stop a passing car— for they were now standing in the green shade of the trees in the Plaza Mayor—"and that shall be to the church of San Francisco and the *Paseo*."

One of the most quaint and picturesque of the beautiful old churches of Puebla is the ancient church of San Francisco, delightfully situated on a raised platform, which is reached by a fine flight of stone steps and planted with great trees that cast exquisite shadows over the façade of the church. This façade is of dark brick, set with panels of tiles, and ornamented by stone statues and elaborate stone carvings, the central basso-relievo representing St. Francis receiving the stigmata, while above rises an unusually lofty and graceful tower. Like other churches belonging to the monastic orders, this church is but the wreck and remnant of a noble group of sanctuaries now mostly desecrated and devoted to secular purposes. The monastery adjoining the church is at present a barracks and military hospital. The chapels, dismantled and abandoned, are falling into decay, and part of the ancient monastery garden is occupied by a bull-ring! But dear to the people for its antiquity and holiness, the despoiled yet still lovely sanctuary stands upon its shady eminence, embosomed in the soft green of its spreading trees, and presenting such a wholly delightful picture as the eye must ever love to dwell upon.

It is unfortunate that the interior of the fine old church has suffered (in the fullest sense of that term) from the rage for restoration which, not always guided by the taste that is sometimes displayed in the work, has injured many most interesting Mexican churches. Cruciform, without aisles, the great single nave is so imposing in its proportions and is covered by so noble a vaulted roof, that one must doubly regret the “Doric absurdities" and crude frescoes with which it has been disfigured in later times. The choir, with its finely-carved stalls, is in a gallery over the entrance, upheld by an arch so flat that it almost ceases to be an arch at all.

"I don't think," said the general, regarding it critically, "that I should ever have thought of it as an arch, had not my attention been drawn to it by the story of the architect, who, entertaining grave doubts of its stability, when it was completed incontinently disappeared without removing the supports, and how the monks, declining to run any risks, set fire to the timbers and burned them out, when, to the wonder of all, the arch remained firm."

“That was certainly a case of a man building better than he knew," said Travers. "I presume, however, the architect came back when he heard the gratifying result, to inform the monks that he had always been perfectly assured of the success of the work and only desired to give them a pleasant surprise."

"There is one thing here which I should like to see," said Dorothea, "a little image of the Blessed Virgin under the title of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, called La Conquistadora, that was brought from Spain by Cortes and given by him to his friend the Tlascalan chief, in gratitude for the aid rendered by the latter at the time of the Conquest."

"It is preserved in the tabernacle of the altar yonder," said Russell; "a small figure about eight inches high, carved in wood, now worm-eaten and crumbling. Of its age and of its history there is no question; but, unless we could find the sacristan and obtain permission from the authorities of the church, I fear there is little hope of seeing it."

“I think," said the general, "that we have had enough of sacristans for one day. Let us take La Conquistadora for granted. Meanwhile here seems to be an interesting chapel."

"This," said Russell, "is dedicated to Blessed Sebastian Aparicio, a lay brother of the Franciscan order who, besides his established claims to holiness, has also the distinction of having introduced oxen and wheeled carts into Mexico."

"And I am certain," said Travers, “that from the day of their introduction to the present time the fashion of the carts has not changed."

"He lived a long time," Russell went on, "having been born in 1502 and dying in 1600, and led a very humble, holy, and useful life. For many years he drove an ox-cart post over the Vera Cruz road between Jalapa and the capital, and for a long while thereafter continued to drive an ox-cart post through the dangerous country between the City of Mexico and Zacatécas. He encountered many perils; but being much loved for his simple holiness by the Blessed Virgin and certain of the saints, great numbers of miracles were wrought in his behalf. You will perceive that all the pictures in this chapel illustrate his life and set forth many of the miracles."

"The atmosphere of the *Fioretti* again," said Margaret Langdon, as they walked from one to another of the paintings, crude enough as works of art, but touching in their attempt to represent these heavenly interpositions in the life of the humble cart-driver, with the courage of a soldier and the heart of a saint, whom the Church has honoured by beatification.

But quaint and full of interest as the interior of the old sanctuary proved, they returned with much pleasure to the contemplation of its wonderfully picturesque exterior. Stone benches are placed in the shade before the stately flight of steps, and seated thereon they could either look upward at the exquisite tones of the time-mellowed, richly-sculptured façade, or let their gaze wander down the inviting vistas of the old *Paseo* which extends from this point along the terraced bank of the Atoyac.

It is a charming spot this *Paseo,* one of the loveliest pleasure-grounds in Mexico, with a sylvan beauty that seems to owe little or nothing to art. The great trees which, with their spreading boughs interlacing against the turquoise sky. Throw such depths of foliaged shadow on the broad walks and stretches of turf below, appear to be remnants of some forest of Nature's own planting, so thickly are they set, so freely have they thrown out their wide branches to sun and air, and so full of rugged beauty are their massive trunks. At the end of this delightful pleasance the path mounts a hill, on the crest of which are many houses and churches, with a glimpse of greater heights beyond.

"Yonder," said Russell, "are the hill and fort of Guadalupe, from which, if you can extend your walk so far, is to be seen one of the great views of the world. Shall we attempt it? It should not be very difficult, since the hill was in ancient times—that is, thirty or forty years ago—the site of a church instead of a fort, and as it was constantly visited by pilgrims, it cannot be a very fatiguing ascent."

The general looked doubtful. "They might have considered the fatigue a penitential exercise," he said. “But lead on—if we find the way too difficult, there is always the alternative of turning back."

Passing therefore by the curious group of churches composing the Calvario which rose on the left of the road, and by the little church of the Piadosa and the fine mass of San Juan del Rio with its corrugated dome of brickwork on the right, they entered upon the ancient causeway, along which have journeyed so many processions with lights and banners in the old religious days, and so many devout persons singly or in bands, to pay their respects to Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe. The ascent here became more steep, although it was not so much the steepness which rendered progress difficult as the exceeding roughness of the pavement. This made walking truly

a penitential exercise, and one which by the general at least was not taken in a very penitential spirit.

"I thought how it would be!" he fumed. "Confound the people who make such roads! Why must they put down a pavement calculated to cut one's feet to pieces? These old Spanish causeways are the most infernal inventions—"

“What a good thing it is," remarked Dorothea, “that we do not happen to be religious pilgrims, like the good souls who have preceded us along this rather rugged way, or else I fear we should have to dismiss papa!”

"A little more of this and I shall dismiss myself," said the general. "Why the deuce didn't we get a carriage to come up here? Russell, you ought to have known better."

“Courage!” said Russell, laughing. “Here are the walls of the fort just above us, and when we once gain the hill you will be repaid for all the difficulties of the ascent."

It was as he said. When once the hill was gained, when passing through the gate of the deserted fortifications— now held by a garrison of one old veteran—they found themselves upon the summit, so long sanctuary-crowned and later the scene of the fiercest carnage of war, the view which burst upon their vision was such as would have repaid them for an ascent of tenfold difficulty. And when Russell, after a few friendly words to the old soldier, accompanied by a transfer of current coin, led them to the northwest angle of the fort, and stretching forth his hand impressively said, "*Mir é* Puebla!" there was a pause of silence more eloquent than speech.

At their feet, spread out like a map, the city lay, a mass of flat-roofed houses, of richly-carved towers, of domes shining like jewels in the sunlight, of the feathery foliage of plazas and gardens, of white walls and arches and quaintly decorated façades, and, rising superbly above all, the great cathedral towers dominating the whole picture. There is not in Mexico, there is hardly in the world, a scene more rich in colour, more strikingly Oriental in detail. And beyond its glittering mass, accentuated here and there by such glowing touches as the soaring blue dome of the Compañía, the great yellow dome of the Carmen, the brilliant red dome of San Cristóbal, the white dome of the Soledad, and countless others of innumerably varied tints, spreads the wide plain, and yet beyond, rising with incomparable majesty into the serene azure of the sky, fit in their white-robed splendour to form the very battlements of heaven, Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl stand, drawn marvellously near by the radiant clearness of the atmosphere, yet still distant, mysterious, sublime.

“Puebla of the Angels!" said Mrs. Langdon at length. "Surely the city is worthy of its angelic founders—beautiful with an exceeding beauty, and fortunate even beyond Mexico in its situation! Nothing could be imagined more perfect in picturesqueness than the grace of its architecture and the rich, soft variety of its colour, as we see it from here."

“We have a very fine view also—the finest we have yet had—of the two great volcanoes," said the genera], gazing beyond Puebla towards those mighty forms upon the western horizon.

“Come to the other angle," said Russell, "and I will show you three snow-crowned volcanoes, one of which is the most peerless of all mountains in my opinion—beautiful Orizaba. But first look yonder, immediately over the city, and you will see some great white arches shining out upon a hill—the façade of a hacienda upon the Cerro de San Juan. Look still farther

and you will perceive a church. It is the sanctuary of Los Remedios crowning the Pyramid of Cholula."

But it was only from the north-eastern angle of the fort that the view, which is truly one of the greatest in the world, burst fully upon them. And how can language render the glory of such a view—the ineffable colour which makes it divine, the majesty of cloud-soaring heights, the wide expanse of luxuriant valley, and the lucid depths of jewel-like sky! Far and fair in all directions spread the rich levels of the plain—"*hermosissima vega*" indeed!—broken here and there by swelling hills and set with picturesque villages and shining haciendas, the great mountain range, stretching like a mighty rampart across its borders, wearing tints of royal amethyst and ethereal azure as it rises into the kingly height of its snow-crowned sovereigns. And, piercing with shining crest the infinite blue of the eastern heaven, another sovereign of the sky and clouds appears, magnificent Orizaba, the only mountain of equal height in the world that, thus detached and apart from others, rises to such altitude. Nearer, the noble height of the Malintzi—just escaping the snow-line at thirteen thousand feet above the sea—throws its broad shadow over the smiling land, while from the borders of Tlascala peak upon peak and serrated ridge upon serrated ridge suggest the Alpine character of that State, now so small in the Republic of Mexico, once so great in making the history of Anahuac.

“And that is your favourite of all mountains yonder?" asked Dorothea, turning at length to Russell and indicating the dazzling summit of Orizaba. "Do you really think it finer than our mighty friend Popocatepetl?"

“I really think so," he answered. “Orizaba is only a few hundred feet lower than Popocatepetl, and has the advantage over that hoary monarch of comparative isolation of position and a marvellous majesty of form. If you could see it nearer—as I hope you will—its base and giant sides girded with forests, while its symmetrical peak towers into the blue upper air, clothed with eternal snow, you too would hail it, like the Aztecs, as the 'star-mountain,' unapproachable in beauty, sublime in situation, the star of the sailor far out at sea, and star-like, when one regards it from the burning lands at its feet, in its pure, cold, dazzling remoteness."

"You observed that you hope I will see it nearer," said Dorothea with a shade of wistfulness in her tone. “How do you propose that shall be accomplished?"

“Most easily. It will not do to go back to Mexico without having seen something of the *tierra caliente* now that we are so near it. And Orizaba is king of all that region. Go where you will—to Jalapa, to Cordoba, to Orizaba— you must look up to his lordly head ever shining above you."

“*Le roi est mort*!" said she, turning her back on Popocatepetl and his consort, and facing the white crest, already beginning to flush with sunset splendours, of the "star-mountain." *"Vive le roi*! I salute his Majesty Orizaba, and I shall be delighted to wander through any or all of the regions that lie within his realm."

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XX.

THE PYRAMID OF CHOLULA.

"IT is no wonder," said Mrs. Langdon, "that the people of this country start everywhere so very early in the morning—for surely there never were such mornings anywhere else, except perhaps in the garden of Eden!"

It was a remark which, in one form or another, they had all made several times before, but no one found its repetition strange as their tram-car, passing out of the city through the arch of the Garita de Mexico, emerged into the wide, rejoicing beauty of the plain bathed in floods of sunshine, and spreading to a distant background of radiant heights, where the exquisite freshness of early morning seemed embodied in their robes of delicate mist. Puebla, with its Byzantine domes radiating light from their glazed surfaces, was speedily left behind, and following the beautiful Atoyac Valley, passing the Cerro de San Juan crowned by its white-arched hacienda, they saw before them in direct line of vision the Pyramid of Cholula rising out of the green, level expanse. On one side a handsome stone viaduct—solid and durable like all the public works of the country—carries the highway to the City of Mexico, the ancient Camino Real, along which for three centuries journeyed foot-travellers, horsemen, and heavy, cumbrous coaches; across the luxuriant valley, haciendas and mills come into sight, the tower of the sanctuary of Guadalupe appears on a low hill, and presently the tramway, entering the town of Cholula, passes between lines of flat-roofed dwellings and quaint old churches, to pause at the base of the colossal mound.

"One cannot wonder," said Travers, as alighting they looked with something of awe at the stupendous relic of primitive days, “that any one should have considered this a natural hill until the researches of archaeologists clearly proved its artificial character."

“It is exceedingly difficult to believe that it is not natural," said the general, "the appearance is so exactly that of the isolated hills that rise in this valley."

"And the luxuriant growth of verdure upon it adds so much to the natural effect," said Mrs. Langdon.

“Not to speak of that paved road leading to the summit," said Russell. "But where the tramway has cut through a corner of the hill, we can see the material of which it is composed—a conglomerate of sun-dried bricks, lava, and pebbles."

"And the pyramidal form in successive terraces, can still be clearly perceived," said the general. “But let us ascend! When we have gained the summit we can recall Humboldt and consult Bandelier at our leisure."

Notwithstanding the strikingly natural appearance of the pyramid in its present overgrown and picturesque state, its great successive platforms can be very plainly traced as the ascent to the summit is made by the massive stairway (of Spanish construction) which leads upwards from level to level, and the original form of a truncated pyramid, facing with its four sides the cardinal points and divided into the same number of terraces, as it appears blazoned upon the ancient coat-of-arms of the city of Cholula, may clearly be discerned by anyone with the least knowledge of the light which archaeology has thrown upon this ancient monument. Nothing in Mexico had interested the general so much. Again and again as they climbed upwards, he paused to point out the resemblance which in its primitive perfection the pyramid had borne to the most ancient erections of Babylon and of Egypt.

"In its original form," observed Russell, "it must have been strikingly similar to the Pyramid of Sakkara on the Nile, which is built in platforms or stories like this."

"But in colossal size," said the general, "we can only compare it to the great Pyramid of Cheops, the accepted standard for magnitude in building. And when we consider that the base of this erection is absolutely twice as large as the base of that, the greatest Egyptian pyramid, we begin to understand its astounding dimensions."

“Humboldt," said Russell, “made a comparison which appeals even more strongly to the modern imagination, when he told his readers to consider a mass of bricks covering a space four times as large as the Place Vendôme and thrice the height of the Palace of the Louvre."

“I don't agree with you," said Travers. “I don't think that comparison appeals to the imagination nearly as much as a comparison with the pyramids of Egypt. The fact is that comparisons are all very well, but there is nothing like figures to bring forcibly to the mind anything which can be expressed in that manner. At least nothing impresses me so much as to be told that the base of this mound covers forty-five acres and its summit embraces more than one acre."

“By what different means people are impressed!" said Mrs. Langdon. "Now, the mere enumeration of acres conveys nothing to my mind—that is, in any accurate sense."

"My experience is that there is nothing like sight to convey impressions to the mind," said Dorothea; "and therefore I move that instead of talking about the pyramid we continue on our way to the summit and look at it."

This practical proposal being received with approval, the party moved on from the terrace where they had paused to rest and lingered to talk, up the last ascent, which brought them to the summit of the mound, a polygonal platform paved and surrounded by a parapet.

Entering upon this space by a portal, with a stone cross inside, they found themselves facing the beautiful church of Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, which takes the place of the heathen temple that once crowned the pyramid. Overshadowed by four great cypresses of unknown antiquity, the stately towers and dome of this noble church, visible from whatever point of the wide plain one looks towards the historic mound, form an object to touch the deepest chords of feeling. Faint indeed must be any glimmering of Christian sentiment in the minds or hearts of those who can look unmoved upon this sanctuary of Christian faith, enshrining the altar of God and bearing the lovely name of Her who is the supreme type of purity and tenderness, raised aloft in the sight of earth and heaven, an embodied and triumphant act of faith and love, upon this height once darkened by the most appalling rites of a sanguinary idolatry.

And, standing here, it is impossible not to feel the thrilling spell of the mysterious antiquity of this deeply interesting country. The vision of shadowy, vanished races enchains the fancy, as from the mighty pyramid which their hands erected one looks out over the fair land they once possessed. Who and what were they, those wonderful "builders,"* who have left monuments which rival those of Egypt in grandeur, and possibly surpass them in antiquity, yet who have themselves vanished so utterly that not even a tradition of them remains behind?

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* "Toltec" is an Aztec word signifying "builder."

Whither did they fly, never again to look upon the shrines of their gods or the valleys, lakes, and mountains of their land? History is silent, but here on their ancient pyramid, looking afar at the serene heights which saw their toil and their sad-hearted flight, one can feel no compassion for the doom which in turn overtook the invaders and ravagers from whom they fled.

“There is nothing in the history which we know half so interesting or stimulating to curiosity as the deserted cities of races concerning whom history tells nothing," said Mrs. Langdon, after they had for some time discussed these things. “Mystery opens such a wide field for the imagination! Now, the temple which the Spaniards found upon this pyramid was dedicated to that mysterious personage, the strange white teacher, or 'fair God,' Quetzalcoatl. But who or what was Quetzalcoatl? Has it ever been decided whether he was a myth or a man?"

"It is a question which it is impossible to decide," Russell answered. "We only know that the positive tradition of a beneficent and powerful stranger—a white, bearded man—who taught the people a lofty doctrine and then departed promising to return, existed among all the races of southern America at the time of the discovery of the New World."

“Isn’t there some idea that he may have been the apostle St. Thomas, who, according to an ancient belief of the Church, visited India?"

“That suggestion was made by several writers, but the most eminent authority on the antiquities of Mexico, Señor Orozco y Berra, pointed out that Quetzalcoatl figured in Mexican history about the tenth century of our era, while St. Thomas, as we are aware, belonged to the first."

“How can any one tell in what century Quetzalcoatl figured?" demanded Dorothea incredulously. "Any statement of time relating to unwritten history can only be an approximate guess."

“Even so, nine or ten centuries is too wide a gap to be bridged by a conjecture," said her father.

"And, moreover, the tenth century is modern history," Dorothea went on, "while I have been thinking of this pyramid as old, old—old, perhaps, as those of Egypt."

“The era of Quetzalcoatl—at which, as you truly say, we can only guess—does not touch the age of this pyramid," returned Russell. “It was here possibly long before he passed through the land, but when the process of his deification took place—if we suppose him to have been a man, as seems most probable—a temple in his honour was very naturally erected upon this ancient monument. You see there is a tradition that on his way to the coast he paused in Cholula and spent twenty years in teaching the people a knowledge of the "sciences and arts, a pure and elevated morality, and a form of worship in which the only offerings were fruits and flowers."

"They had sadly forgotten his teachings," said Travers, "since we are told that at the time of the arrival of the Spaniards the number of human victims sacrificed here annually was six thousand."

“Human sacrifice was an Aztec innovation on the ancient worship," said Russell. “But the conquistadores were astonished by the knowledge which the people displayed of many fine and delicate arts of manufacture and decoration."

"I do not think there is the least difficulty in believing that," said Mrs. Langdon, "when we see so many proofs of the artistic genius of the people to-day."

"One proof," said Russell," you saw when you were admiring the admirable work of renovation in the Cathedral of Puebla. That work was done under the able and artistic direction of Señor Leandro Tello, a native of Cholula, and of Indian extraction."

“Perhaps he is the descendant of the architect of that splendid Temple of Quetzalcoatl which stood upon this pyramid, and which the Spanish chronicler who saw it before it was destroyed describes in such glowing terms," suggested Travers. “Poor Quetzalcoatl! One cannot but sympathise in his hard fate in having had slaughtered victims constantly offered up to him in the very place where he had taught such a highly aesthetic form of worship."

“I should say 'poor victims' rather than 'poor Quetzalcoatl,'" remarked Dorothea in a feeling tone. "One likes to remember that here, on this spot, Cortes broke open the cages in which the victims for sacrifice were confined and set them free. They must have thought that indeed those powerful strangers were 'the white gods,' the promised successors of their ancient divinity."

“One also likes to fancy," said Travers, "with what triumphant satisfaction the bold conqueror must have seized upon this great *teocalli*, and, throwing down its truly infernal altars soaked with human blood, erected in its place a mighty cross."

Mrs. Langdon looked up at the symbol of redemption shining against the turquoise sky, high above the sanctuary bearing the fair name of Our Lady of Succour, which stands where such heavenly succour came on that long-past day to those trembling victims of a terrible faith, and to all the long line of others yet unborn, delivered alike from their danger and from the darkness of such fearful worship. “And yet," she said, "there are people who venture to cast a reproach at the Spaniards who did such work and thought rather of saving the people's souls— not to speak of their bodies— than of preserving their temples."

Pyramid of Cholula

"Especially since the destruction of the temples was the necessary practical step towards proving that the dark rites which they had enshrined were forever at an end," said Russell. "Certainly those soldiers, with their ardent faith, could have had little conception when on entering these temples even their robust frames were seized with sick shuddering at the horrible signs of human slaughter which abounded, that in after-ages men could be found who, whether on sentimental or scientific grounds, would blame the righteous indignation with which they hurled down those thrice-accursed walls, and raised the altar of God upon them."

“I do, however, wish," said Dorothea in a tone of regret, "that it had not been necessary for Cortes to kill so many of the Cholulans, after they had received and entertained him."

“Wish, then, that war were not war at all, but Arcadian pastime," said Russell. “What is called the massacre of Cholula was a stern measure which proved, like all of his other acts, that no man was ever bred to the profession of arms with a more inborn genius for it than Hernando Cortes. The general who does not anticipate treachery by himself striking and striking hard, is not likely to have anything to record but failure. On the action of Cortes that day in Cholula hung not only the fate of his expedition but the lives of himself and his men. He violated no hospitality, for the hospitality was only a snare—as the Tlascalans had warned him before he entered the city— and it was necessary to give a proof of his power which should at once strike awe, and in the end prevent bloodshed."

"No doubt the victims to whom such unlooked-for deliverance came thought it a most holy massacre," observed Travers. "And in any event they would all have been dead long ago, you know."

"Yes—long ago," said Dorothea dreamily. She looked down at Cholula sleeping quietly in the sunshine, with so little recollection of the fierce slaughter of that day four centuries gone by, and through the still air the dim, ghostly echoes of the wild cries of the fighting seemed to rise to her ears, as no doubt they rose to the ears of those trembling victims who could not have dreamed that earth or heaven held any possibility of release for them.

Presently the others moved away, but she remained standing by the parapet, her slight figure silhouetted against the blue depths of sky, absorbed in contemplation of a picture unsurpassed in beauty and far-stretching associations. Encircling the base of the pyramid lies now, as of old, the city of Cholula, from which the inhabitants went forth with music and flowers to welcome the strangers who had come to their gates, and where Cortes counted upon the temples four hundred towers, "of which no temple had more than two and many only one." Beautiful are the domes and minarets of the score of churches which have taken the place of those dread temples in ancient Cholula; but since Puebla of the Angels rose across the plain three and a half centuries ago, the city has steadily decreased in size and importance, until that is now but a sleepy Indian town which was once the proud commercial centre of Anahuac.

But still above it towers the mighty pyramid, imperishable as the everlasting peaks that look down upon it, and still around, inexhaustible in fertility, spreads the smiling loveliness of the plain, its leagues of waving grain broken only by many a shining arcade and many a graceful church-tower, stretching away until they melt into misty distance at the feet of the great mountain wall which, as if carved in lapis-lazuli, encircles the valley. And rising high above all, so full of solemn grandeur and infinite repose that it is no wonder that to the fancy of a primitive

people they seemed as gods, tower the dazzling crests of Popocatepetl and the White Lady; and still, as of old, the rushing breeze comes down from their summits, cooled by the boundless wastes of snow and the glaciers which not even a tropical sun can melt, to sweep over the wide fields rich with their bounteous harvest, over embowered villages sleeping behind pale pink or amber walls, over sanctuary-crested hills, over bright streams and stately forests, until it comes to wave the dark boughs of the immemorial cypresses on the mysterious pyramid of a vanished race, and to stir the light locks of hair above the eyes, bright with dreams and visions, of the girl who stands, wrapped as in a spell, upon its ancient surface.

Presently a voice at her side startled her by speaking unexpectedly. "The others have gone into the church," said Travers. “Do you care to follow them?”

"Not now," she answered, her eyes still fastened on the marvellous distances of the scene. “I think," she went on after a moment, "that I prefer this view to that from the fort of Guadalupe. It is much the same in its features—but here one remembers so many things."

“And imagines so many more," said Travers, smiling. “It is a fine place for either memory or imagination," he went on, taking off his hat so that his brow might feel the delightful freshness of the breeze, and leaning against the parapet with an air which indicated that he, too, was culpably indifferent to the interior of the sanctuary. "It is astonishing how the charm of this kind of life takes possession of one, and how loath one is to think of ending it. I feel as if I might even take an attack of archaeological fever if I were to visit a few more Aztec remains."

“I don't feel as if I might take it," said Dorothea. “I have already taken it. I should like to visit all the ancient Toltec—for you forget that they are not Aztec—remains in the country, the sacred city, Teotihuacan, and the pyramids of the Sun and Moon, and the temples of Palenque—
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“Don’t forget the mysterious, traditional, aboriginal city of which Russell was talking last night, that has been the subject of so many explorers' dreams, and which the cura of Quiche saw from the mountains of Quezaltenango 'with its white walls shining like silver in the sun'! To find that would be worth while, and put a feather in a man's cap in these days when feathers of any kind are hard to win—this old world having become so stale, commonplace, and well known! After our pleasant party separates, I think I shall go with Russell into Chiapas and Guatemala and see if we cannot find that city. It seems to me that something must exist to account for such persistent legends and traditions, and there is a region lying on the borders of those States which is more completely unexplored than the interior of Africa."

Dorothea looked at him with a glance of mingled envy and wrath. "Are you not ashamed," she said, "to come and talk to me in this manner and make me wild to be a man, too, and go wherever I would like? That is the only privilege I envy a man—freedom to go where he pleases. It is all nonsense to say that a woman has the same freedom in this age of the world. She has not got it, unless she lays aside a hundred things worth more than anything she gains. And why should you speak as if we were about to separate—which means that we are to set off tamely for home, and you are to accompany Mr. Russell into unexplored wildernesses, in search of legendary cities? I never heard of anything so unfair and unjust!"

Travers regarded her with a smile. “I really had not the least intention of exasperating you," he said, “by alluding to what is unfortunately quite certain. No one desires the separation

of our party less than I, for I frankly confess it has been much more of a success than I anticipated—"

She made him a slight, mocking courtesy. “A thousand thanks," she cried. "So kind of you to have found us tolerable!"

“And so kind of you," he retorted, "not to have insisted on my banishment before our journey was half accomplished. I rather expected that. But where was I? Oh, yes—although no one, I repeat, desires less than I, the end of anything so pleasant as our wanderings, there is no doubt that they must end—probably very soon. After you have satisfactorily married Phil—"

“Which it appears that we came to Mexico to do," she murmured.

“The general will begin to think of turning his face homeward, and then—"

“Papa will not think of such a thing for—for ever so long yet!" she asserted vehemently. "He knows that we have not half seen Mexico. Why, the farther we go the more one realises how much there is to see! Vistas open beyond vistas! As yet we have only followed beaten paths and seen the most common things—things open to every tourist who comes into the country."

“Oh, no. You forget the hacienda. Tourists are not generally so lucky as to see anything of the inner life of the country."

“Put that aside, and what I say is true. These brilliant cities, with all their fascinations, are as open to them as to us. But now the time has come for striking into fresher paths. I have my heart set on half a dozen delightful excursions. From here—I mean from Puebla—we must go to Jalapa, to Tlascala, to Orizaba, and perhaps to Vera Cruz. Then when we return to Mexico we must go to Amecameca, to the Sacro Monte—"

“Shall we ascend Popocatepetl? You know that Amecameca is the point whence the ascent is made."

“No” (very regretfully), "that seems impossible, although I should like it of all things. Then we must go to Cuernavaca, to Morelia, and Patzcuaro. And Mitla—we must certainly go to Mitla, for there are such fine ancient remains there!"

"Your projected itinerary leaves one a little breathless," said Travers. “But, as far as I am concerned, I am prepared to follow to all the places you have named and many more. But the general!—can you count upon his docility? Has he been informed regarding these plans?"

“Not yet. It is not best to tell him too much at once. At present he has only heard that we are going to Jalapa to-morrow."

“Leaving Tlascala and Orizaba and Vera Cruz to be sprung upon him later! I applaud your discretion. There is nothing so wise as to avoid useless discussion—and, I may add, to keep elderly gentlemen properly in leading-strings."

"There is not the least intention to keep him in leading-strings. But you have just said that my plans sound formidable—so why should I frighten him with them? Each excursion can be naturally evolved from the other."

“I perceive, and bow before the superior cleverness of the feminine mind. I am afraid that idea of evolution would not have occurred to the clumsy masculine intelligence."

“Whether your intelligence be clumsy or not, you are as usual so sarcastic and disagreeable that I shall go and pay my delayed respects to Nuestra Señora de los Remedios—only hinting that you are entirely at liberty to set out at any time in search of your mysterious city in the wilderness of Chiapas and Guatemala."

"That will come in due time," replied he calmly. "At present, with your kind permission, I prefer to follow you in your projected wanderings. Man is a gregarious animal, and even when his society is only tolerated he prefers companionship to solitude. "

Table of Contents

CHAPTER XXI.

A CITY OF FLOWERS.

A MEXICAN Cashmere, a vale of delights, a city of flowers and bower of enchantment—such is Jalapa, that "bit of heaven let down to earth," as the proverb of the country declares, which lies midway between the plateau and the sea, a hanging-garden of Nature's own, suspended on the side of the great slope from *tierra templada* to *tierra caliente*!

As bewitching as the beauty of its women, also proverb famed, is the beauty of this green valley, swept by mists that keep it ever fresh and moist, with its plantations of coffee and sugar, its forests of bananas, mangoes, oranges, and lemons, with its fair city gleaming like a pearl, embowered in verdure, and its magnificent background of hills, ravines, and mountains, over which stands boldly forth the great Cofre de Perote (the mass of white porphyry resembling a chest, whence its name of *cofre*, showing upon its dark side), while towering above all in unsurpassed majesty is the kingly peak of Orizaba lifting its eternal snows into the dazzling blue of the tropical heaven. The town itself is delightfully old-fashioned, even for Mexico—quaint, irregular, and marvellously picturesque as its narrow streets, lined by massive, single-storied houses, painted in delicate, distemper tints of amber, blue, and pink, with red-tiled overhanging roofs, and windows, almost flush with the pavement, defended by iron bars, climb the steep slope of the hill of Macuiltepec. Miraculously clean are these streets, and so quiet that the town seems to have fallen asleep in the midst of its flowers, overcome by the fragrance that rises from courts filled with tangled roses and gardens overflowing with every variety of tropical bloom.

"It is like a city which man has built, and which Nature has then taken to her heart and made her own," said Margaret Langdon, as they wandered through its steep but charming ways. "For Nature is queen-regnant here. One cannot forget her for a moment. Not only do these garden-beautified, picturesque streets seem less like thoroughfares for coarse, material traffic than like the bowery ways of some Arcadia far from the work-day world, but what a glorious panorama of hills and mountains is outspread before our eyes!"

“Yes," said Dorothea, who had been for some time silent, as if the spell that rendered flowery Jalapa so quiet had fallen also over her, "whether this be *tierra templada* or *tierra caliente*, there can be no doubt that it is a *tierra* of enchanted beauty. And Orizaba, the magnificent, is sovereign of it all. See yonder!—while those exquisite mists are sweeping across the great green flanks of the lower heights, how his glorious head towers in resplendent majesty into the upper air! I surrender Popocatepetl, I abjure Ixtaccihuatl—Orizaba is king, and there is no king like unto him!"

“He is worthy of your allegiance," said Russell, "but you must remember, in justice to the other sovereigns whom you have named, that Orizaba gains immensely in apparent grandeur by the fact that we are nearly four thousand feet lower than when we looked at Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl from the plateau."

“One recalls here," said the general, "the well-known remark of Humboldt, that Mexico has all the climates of the world succeeding each other in layers. In a few hours' travel we passed through as many different zones of temperature and production as if we had travelled half-way from the Arctic Circle to the equator—"

“It was certainly a taste of the Arctic Circle which we had at Perote," said Travers. “How cold it was, and how savage the aspect of the scenery became! There was a wonderful harmony between the massive, frowning castle and the forbidding heights and barren plain around it!"

"But then we commenced immediately to descend," cried Dorothea, "and what enchanting pictures opened to us at every step! I shall never forget those views as we whirled down the mountain-sides—those fairy glens and gorges, those silvery cascades, and the wealth, the marvel of tropical vegetation and colour, growing more luxuriant, more bewildering with every downward mile, until at last we found ourselves—here!"

"In what is evidently a belt lying between the temperate and tropical zones, having the characteristics of both and the drawbacks of neither," said the general, taking advantage of the speaker's lack of breath to put in a word.

"A fragment of Paradise fallen to earth, is the complimentary saying of the Mexicans with regard to Jalapa, you know," said Russell, smiling. "We cannot wonder at the native enthusiasm. It is a delightful spot, which Nature seems to have consecrated by its beauty, and which wraps one in a spell of fascination. I am inclined to think that, if one stayed here long, one might lose both the desire and the power to go away at all."

"I long to wander out into the fair, wild country, that seems beckoning us on all sides," said Dorothea, looking wistfully at the grandeur of the hills and the loveliness of the green valley which surrounded them. "I don't care in the least for anything else—not even for quaint old churches—but only to accept the invitation which Nature seems giving in every breath of this divine air to come out and meet her face to face in her own realms."

"It would be very ungracious to refuse such an invitation," said Russell. “And there are so many excursions to be made around Jalapa, that the only difficulty is in choice. One which I can recommend is to Coatepec—a picturesque village six or seven miles from here, which lies in a beautiful valley surrounded by coffee plantations. There is a tramway which would take us there; but I fancy you would prefer to go on horseback by the old road through the forest."

"For my part I beg to be allowed to choose the tramway," observed the general. “Horses obtained in these places are never worth mounting."

“I will take a burro if nothing else offers," said Dorothea. "Or I will walk. But the tramway I utterly reject, and the road through the forest I must see!"

"Be tranquil! said Russell. "Horses of passable order will be found, and the road through the forest you shall see!"

But when they returned to their hotel—a hostelry worthy of Arcadia, all airy white and blue, the court a mass of trees and flowers, the wide, brick-paved corridors hung with bird cages

and festooned with vines, the walls of the rooms decorated with gaily painted arabesques in fresco—a surprise of a somewhat unlooked-for nature awaited them.

“*Un mensaje por el señor*" said the proprietor, meeting them as they entered and handing to Russell a white envelope.

“A despatch for you, general," said the latter, glancing at the address as he handed it over, while the others paused with that anxiety natural in people away from home, to hear what it might contain.

It required but a moment for the general to ascertain its purport. He tore open the envelope, unfolded the paper within, and laughed. “It is from Phil," he explained. “Here is what he says: 'Have heard from Don Rafael. All right. Leave to-morrow for Mexico. Meet me there.'"

“I suppose 'all right' means that he has been accepted," said Dorothea. "I wish telegrams did not leave quite so much to conjecture. If it is so, I am very glad. But I cannot help wishing that since Don Rafael had already taken so long a time to consider the matter, he had taken just a little more. I am not ready to go back to Mexico yet."

"I am sorry," said the general, "but there seems no alternative about our return. Phil, you perceive, is very emphatic. And since this message is dated in Guadalajara yesterday, I suppose he will reach Mexico to-day."

"To-morrow morning," said Russell.

"Ah, to be sure—to-morrow morning. So we must leave here to-morrow, for I suppose that it is necessary for me to be in Mexico, in order to conclude my negotiations as ambassador—eh, Russell?"

Interior of Sanctuary of los Remedios, Cholula.

"Undoubtedly," replied Russell. "It is to you that the formal answer will be given, and with whom all the details must be arranged. It is an interesting glimpse of a wholly foreign life that this alliance opens for you."

“Hum!— yes," assented the general; "but I confess that I could have dispensed with my part in it. Since, however, it seems that I have come to Mexico to marry Phil, as our French friends say, why, I must go through with all the duties of the position. Don't look so downcast,

Dorothea! When we have settled Phil's affairs, we shall be free to go where we like and stay as long as we please."

“Papa, you are an angel!" cried Dorothea gaily. “On that view of the case I don't mind going back to Mexico, although I should have been glad to stay longer in this lovely spot. But, since it is settled that we are to leave so soon, we must make the most of the short time that remains to us. Therefore, dear Mr. Russell, do go at once and see about the horses for the ride to Coatepec this afternoon."

The horses for the proposed expedition were forthcoming at the appointed time. Sound backs—the only point upon which Dorothea insisted—were certified; and having seen the general off by the tramway, they set forth for the ride along the old road through the forest. But was it merely a road through the forest or a road into some region of enchantment which they entered? What did it matter whether the horses were good or bad, when all that they cared for was to proceed as slowly, linger as long as possible along the way which realised all that they had ever dreamed or fancied of the beauty of Nature in these realms of the tropics? On first passing out of the town and leaving behind its garden-embowered suburbs, they had followed a highway bordered on both sides by hedges covered with rioting flowers of all imaginable hues, over which were views of the rich green valley through which flowed a crystal stream, of mills that were once ancient convents, of haciendas gleaming like alabaster in the sunlight, and beyond all the mighty mountains dappled with clouds, wrapped here and there in robes of fairy-like mist, and lifting their summits to the azure sky. But presently, turning into the road through the forest, they found themselves in another world—a world of exquisite green-tempered shadow, amid which burned with a splendour of colour defying all description the gorgeous flowers that grow here in wild luxuriance. For it is in this zone, hanging between earth and heaven, lying above the parched plain and below the high plateau, that the floral beauty and excess of verdure which are produced by certain conditions of warmth and moisture run riot in transcendent beauty. Towering like giants, the great trees formed a green firmament of shade stretching far as the glance could reach on either hand, beneath which was a wild tangle of vegetation, bursting into unimaginable colour and bloom, a myriad of flowers, intertwined, climbing, crowding, filling every available space, while from tree to tree leaped vines, festooning and trailing, until there seemed a flood of blossoms, a very deluge of gorgeous flowers—exquisite orchids, gigantic hibiscus like masses of flame, the dazzling blossoms of the cactus, great yellow, crimson, and snowy lilies, convolvulus with blooms as large as a moon-flower, roses of every hue, and a thousand nameless flowers mingled in one riotous mass of prodigality and magnificence.

"It is bewildering in its inconceivable luxuriance and beauty," said Dorothea to Travers, as they slowly rode along the shaded avenue that wound through the midst of these marvels. "It is a perfect forest of flowers! No wonder they have overflowed into the gardens of Jalapa! Unless one had seen, one could not have believed that there was such a Paradise of bloom on earth."

"Nature is here transformed into a Circe," said Travers. "The seductive spell of all this loveliness might easily steal one's senses. I perceive the force of Russell's remark that, if one stayed here long, one might forget ever to go away."

“I am certainly sorry that we must go away so soon," said Dorothea in a tone of keen regret. “I had quite set my heart on spending some time here, and then going to Orizaba, which

must be just such another place—it is about the same elevation, you know—for this is the most enchanting part of Mexico that we have yet seen!"

"It strikes me," said Travers, smiling, "that we have made the same remark of various other parts of the country. It is impossible to say what portion of it is most enchanting; but of one thing I am quite sure, that its charm grows upon one in a very irresistible fashion, and that I shall not be satisfied until I have seen much more of it."

"I shall not be satisfied, either," said Dorothea with a sigh. "But sometimes one must of necessity remain unsatisfied. If papa decides to go home after Phil's affair has been settled—as I very much fear that he will—I shall have no alternative but to go also."

There was a moment's pause, and then Travers, looking at her with a smile, said quietly: You are mistaken. You have an alternative. Come with me, and we will not only explore all the places you mentioned the other day, and as many more as you like, but we will find the mysterious aboriginal city of Chiapas, and crown ourselves with glory."

“There is nothing I should like better," replied Dorothea with another sigh, "for you are really a very good travelling companion— not so well informed, of course, as Mr. Russell, and disposed to be indolent sometimes, but always ready to go on as long as one likes, and that is the great thing."

“I am grateful for even so much qualified condemnation," said he, with the smile deepening in his eyes if not on his lips. "And that being the case, I venture to repeat—Come, and let us go on indefinitely, or at least as long as you like !"

Something in his voice—a suspicious underlying tone of earnestness—made Dorothea suddenly aware that his words were not the mere jest they sounded. She started and turned her eyes on him with a glance of inquiry. The look she met plainly answered the doubt in her mind, for a sudden flush rose into her face, and, turning her eyes away again very hastily, she said with a little perceptible nervousness and constraint:

“You are talking absolute nonsense—and nonsense which does not strike me as in very good taste. Let us ride a little faster. Margaret and Mr. Russell are out of sight,"

“It would be a proof of great indifference to all this wonderful beauty which Nature is lavishing around us, and which one cannot but feel is a feast prepared for our special benefit, if we rode fast," said Travers. "Fortunately, 'reining in' these bounding steeds is not a task of much difficulty, although to urge them to any great pace might be. And you are mistaken about my talking absolute nonsense. I do not consider what I said to be nonsense at all. Let us reason upon it."

“There is no reasoning possible upon absurdity," replied Dorothea curtly.

"Upon absurdity—no. But where is the absurdity in what I said! I suggested that since we are both of one mind in desiring to go farther and see more of this delightful country than our friends are likely to care for, we should go together as far and as long as we like. You admit that I am a tolerable companion, and I can assure you that you will never find one more devoted to your service."

“Mr. Travers," said Dorothea speaking now quite haughtily and with a much heightened colour, "I must repeat that I consider a jest of this kind in very bad taste."

“But, good heavens! I have not the faintest intention of jesting," protested that gentleman. "Don't you understand that I am as much in earnest as a man can be? It isn't possible that I need to tell you that I should enjoy wandering through the Desert of Sahara with you?"

“I cannot imagine why you should suppose it was *not* necessary to tell me such an incredible thing, if you desired me to know it," returned Miss Meynell with much dignity and some acerbity. " You certainly could not believe that I was likely to divine it."

“One is told that women do divine these things," he said, "and I presume that it was because I have been for some time so conscious of my own state that I imagined it was equally plain to you. However, if you did not know it before, there is the fact now for your consideration. It is a fact that I do not exactly understand myself," he observed with a half-whimsical air. “But these things defy explanation. Like Beatrice, you have flouted me on every conceivable occasion, and like Benedict I have abjectly turned round and loved you in return. What!"—in answer to a gesture of incredulity on her part—"is it possible that you don't believe me?"

"It is impossible to believe such—yes, really such absurdity!" she replied with an attempt to maintain her dignified demeanour. "You know perfectly well that you have always considered and treated me as a foolish, conceited girl—"

“Pardon me," he interrupted, "but I cannot allow such an assertion to pass uncontradicted. I never thought you foolish or conceited—only very young, very prone to hasty judgment, and very prejudiced against me."

"Which means the same thing," said she severely. "Consequently, it is very difficult to understand how such a sudden change in your opinion has come about."

“It is not so sudden as you fancy. I always thought you charming, even when most perverse. But as for how long I have loved you—See here, my Lady Disdain!"

He held out his hand—and what was there lying in it? A marvellous gem, all leaping, glancing fire and light, its gleaming iris-tinted radiance gaining in effect from the setting that encircled it. “Do you remember this opal," he asked, ' and how I saved it from the rapacity of the fair Violet at Querétaro? I had determined its destiny then. I said in my heart that it should be yours— or no one's! I pleased myself by having it set in this ring when we were in Mexico, and I have waited, hoping the hour would come when you would take it from me—partly as a souvenir of this fair land we both like so well, and partly as a pledge of my life's devotion."

“An opal," observed Dorothea glancing admiringly at the beautiful gem, "is said to bring ill luck."

“I am rather fond of setting superstitions at defiance," replied Travers, "and it does not strike me that it requires very much courage to do so in this case. Instead of a foolish superstition about ill luck, I prefer to recall the ancient fancy that the opal is par excellence the lover's stone, and gives warning by its fading colour and fire when constancy fails or love grows cold. But, even if that fancy be also but a superstition, its strange, poetic beauty is its best warrant for such use: for what other stone carries within it a living soul—a heart of fire like that of love itself?"

Dorothea looked at him with an expression of undisguised surprise. “Do you know," she said simply, “I can hardly believe that it is you who are talking!"

“Because you never fancied that I could know anything of love's heart of fire?" he asked, smiling. "Ah, Lady Disdain, I fear you are not so quick in sympathy as I have imagined, else you

would have divined all this without needing to be told, for sympathy is the gift of the gods, which teaches us things without necessity of speech."

“I fear that I am very stupid, then," said she with an air of humility, “since I certainly need speech to make me aware of things—and generally very plain speech, too."

“Is not my speech plain enough? What more can I say to make you comprehend that I offer you my heart, my life—Bah! how poor words are! And it is nonsense to pretend that you do not understand, that you have not known—"

“I have not!" interposed Dorothea indignantly. “Such an idea as that you had any—well, fancy for me, never entered my mind! How could it, when you have always been as disagreeable to me as possible?"

“I am sorry to hear it," with great gravity. “But I ask now an opportunity to prove how agreeable I can be, while we set out in search of the mysterious city—that fair city of Happiness, 'with its white walls shining like silver in the sun,' which I think that it may be our fortunate fate to find."

“I cannot imagine where you discover any warrant for such a belief in our past relations," said Dorothea, beguiled into laughter. “We should certainly do nothing but quarrel on the road."

“I have not the faintest fear of anything of the kind. Our tilts of words and wit have been but pretence, as we knew, and underneath has lain a mutual comprehension and sympathy of which our companionship on this journey has made us both aware. Can you deny this?"

"Why should I deny it? But, while admitting it, I may be permitted to deny that it furnishes ground for our undertaking the other and longer journey of which you speak."

“Now you are not speaking seriously, and I must beg you to believe that I am very serious. There is no such ground for undertaking the journey of which we speak—that perilous journey upon which so many lives make shipwreck—as the sympathy of thought and feeling that exists between us, and for which—speaking for myself at least—I think we may find another and diviner name. It is like the fire in this gem, a thing impossible to fix or analyse, but which gives colour, radiance, and beauty to what would else be but a dull, cold stone—as dull and cold as life without the love it typifies."

There was a moment's silence. So far Dorothea had felt as if the matter might be treated as one of what he had called their usual tilts of words; but now it had reached a point of seriousness when further fencing became impossible, and when dignity demanded that she should treat it as seriously as himself. But unexpectedly enough, she found herself strangely at a loss how to answer him. It was all true. The sympathy which he claimed she could not deny. There was no one to whom she had learned to turn so instinctively, with such assurance of comprehension; and yet—was this indeed the one thing, radiant and wonderful as the fire of the opal, which is unlike anything else in the life it alone has power to transform? It was a pause of doubt, of sudden, startled questioning and indecision which held her silent as they rode on through the flower-filled beauty of the tropical forest, which spread its silent, marvellous world of colour and fragrance around their tree-arched way.

But suddenly the shadowed forest road came to an end, and, emerging again into the full splendour of the golden day, they beheld a view which in its extent and magnificence is one of the great views of the world. Smiling in the rich luxuriance of its varied products, the beautiful valley of Coatepec lay before them, with its plantations of coffee, its bananas, orange-trees, and

fields of sugar-cane, in the midst of which the village—a mass of softly-tinted walls and tiled roofs, grouped around the tower of its church— nestled half-buried in plumy foliage. Framing this idyllic picture, the great Sierras stretched across the western sky, their lower spurs clothed with green forest and riven by purple gorges, amid which one knew instinctively that the thunder of falling waters forever sounded, as the silver cataracts plunged over the mountains' sides into tangled depths of tropical verdure below, the farther heights towering upward in stupendous grandeur, with a massiveness of form, an impressiveness of aspect that expressed the utmost sublimity of Nature, while still above and beyond all, rising into a realm all their own—that fine, pure upper air where they reign supreme—the great Cofre de Perote stood, and Orizaba lifted his shining crest—a vision of beauty so glorious that it seemed to belong rather to the heaven into which it soared than to the earth below! And then, turning their gaze eastward, what is that faint, blue, level line which they see afar, that line which melts into the dazzling azure of the sky like the meeting of two eternities?—what but the sea, breaking upon the shores of the *tierra caliente*, the "hot lands" over which the glance travels in a single downward sweep from the regions of eternal snow!

“O Mexico!" cried Dorothea at last, as if rapture could only find expression in apostrophe. "What can one say of it? One is inclined to fall into rhapsody, to cry out, for all the insensible world to hear, that it is an enchantress among lands, uniting every beauty as it unites every climate, steeped in colour, full of romance, delighting and enthralling all who have eyes to see and imagination to feel its surpassing beauty and charm."

"We," said Travers—whom even the view of Coatepec could not at this moment divert from his purpose—"have both the eyes and the imagination, so let us use them. Come, Dorothea *mia*, remember how few are the days of perfect sunshine which life allows, and let us not forego the chance to wander light-heartedly a little longer in this Land of the Sun, to drink in its alluring brightness, warm and sweet as southern wine, and store up its memories for the cold, grey days of existence that may be to come."

"But how can you talk as if it were but a question of a holiday journey?" cried Dorothea in the tone of one who struggles with herself. “I should act like a child if I listened to you. To wander with you through Mexico might be very pleasant—I do not deny that —but how would it be to journey through life, through all the cold grey days of which you speak?"

“I think, my dear," he said gently, "that we should carry with us some sunshine to brighten them— a sunshine of the heart sweeter and warmer even than that of Mexico. Do not fear! If I have not played a very lover-like part hitherto, I only require a little encouragement to prove what ardour has been quickened in me by the association of this journey—although indeed I think that I must have loved you long ago, before I ever suspected it. So, take my opal—Mexico's own gem—and let kingly Orizaba himself bear witness that you will at least give me a hearing. Perhaps I am presumptuous to believe that I need no more."

Presumptuous or not, Orizaba in his shining majesty stands witness that Dorothea extended her hand and took the opal.

THE END.

Edited by Yawtsong Lee
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