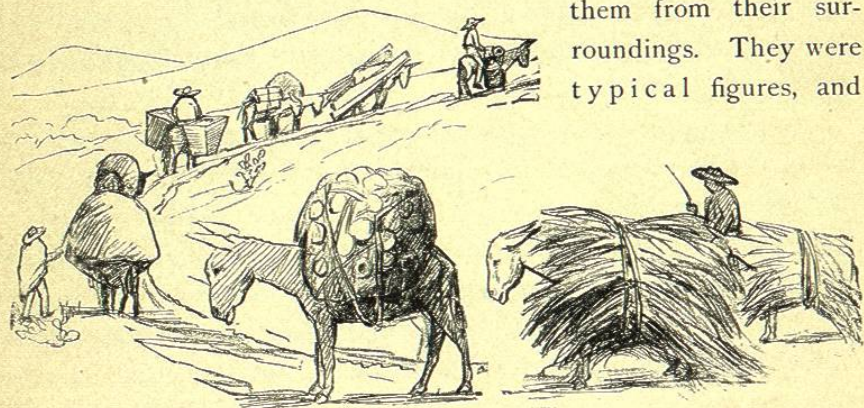


He gave me his history in exaggerated negro style; how he had been in the war with his young master; had been taken prisoner, made to serve as cook on a Yankee gun-boat, had escaped, married a Mexican; and, after so many vicissitudes, had not forgotten his early training in his manner of addressing me.

Foremost among the objects that claimed my sympathy were the poor, over-laden, beaten donkeys; they seemed ubiquitous, and the picture my window framed never lacked a meek-eyed *burro*, until I could not separate them from their surroundings. They were typical figures, and



"THERE GOES THE MEXICAN RAILROAD."

at last I came to regard any scene from which they were absent as incomplete.

They passed in a never-ending procession, bearing every imaginable commodity. I soon noticed that if the leader or "bell-wether" of the gang stopped, the rest did the same. If goaded to desperation by the merciless driver, the only resistance they offered was to quietly but doggedly lie down.

Often dozens of them passed, with green corn on the stalks, suspended gracefully about them, and in such quantities that nothing was visible but the donkeys' heads and ears, the corn spread out in fan-shape, reminding me of a lady's train, or a peacock in full plumage. The burros moved evenly and silently along, without an un-

dulation to disturb the beauty and symmetry of the corn-stalk procession.

Pancho's knowledge of burros was as profound as of other subjects. As fifty of them were passing one morning, he happened to see me gazing on the strange scene, when the oracle broke silence by saying: "*Alli va el ferro-carril Mexicano*" ("There goes the Mexican railroad"), adding parenthetically, "*Tambien se llaman licenciados*" ("They are also called lawyers"); "*tienen cabezas muy duras*" ("they have very hard heads").

At last I was convinced that *burros* are possessed of an uncommon amount of good sense as well as much patience and meekness. Their shrewdness was intensely amusing to me when I saw how keenly they watched the *arriero*—driver—unburden one of their *companeros*, and how quickly they jumped into the place to be also relieved of their terrible loads.

A man with a crate of eggs hanging from his head went trotting by, advertising his business by screaming, "*Huevos! huevos!*" in deafening tones. Pancho, at his post of duty in the *zaguan*, called the vender with the long tangled hair and swarthy skin. After peeping cautiously around, he entered, when

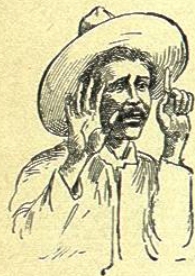


*Huevos! huevos!*

I went at once to make the bargain for myself, and to turn over another leaf in the book of my experiences. I wanted to buy two dozen, and handing him fifty cents, told Pancho to count the eggs. The man turned the half-dollar over and over—looking at me and then at the half-dollar; and at last handed the money back to me, saying: "*No se venden asi*" ("They are not sold in this way")—" *solamente por reales*" ("only by reals"). I said: "You sell six for a real,

(twelve and one-half cents), it is the same at twenty-five cents a dozen." The words had hardly passed my lips, when he turned and looked me directly in the eye, with an expression which meant, "Well, now, look here, madame, you'll not take advantage of me in that way; I know the customary manner of doing business in this country, and there will be no change in selling eggs." Pancho put in a plea for him, adding: "*Es costumbre del pais*" ("It is the custom of the country"), which reconciled me.

The vender began counting slowly the fingers of his right hand with his left—"uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco,"—then holding up the



SIX FOR A REAL.

index finger of the left hand—*seis*—and extending the six fingers, palms to the front, waved them back and forth before his determined face, as in low guttural tones that made me shiver, he said: "*No, señ-o-ri-ta, so-'a-men-te á se-is por un re-ól!*" ("I will only sell them at six for a real"), by dozens—never! Lifting his hat politely, he took his departure saying, "*Hasta luego!*" ("I'll come again"). But I thought he need not trouble himself.

Seeing everything and everybody so conservative, running in the groove of centuries, reminded me that I was losing sight of my own "costumbres." The little fire-place in which the cooking had been done became distasteful, and I longed for a cooking-stove. A Mexican gentleman whom I did not know, on hearing of my desire, kindly offered to lend us one that he had bought about twenty years before, but had been unable to have it used to any extent, owing to the prejudices of the servants.

With the utmost delight, I saw the *cargador* (porter) enter the big door with this time-worn rickety desire of my heart. But when he slipped it from his head, the rattle of its dilapidated parts made me quake with anxiety.

Both Pancho and the *cargador* exclaimed in one voice,

"*Caramba!*" ("Goodness gracious alive!"), gazing with puzzled expressions on the wreck.

The *cargador* was the first to break the silence that followed this ebullition of astonishment.

"*Que atroz!*" ("How atrocious!") he exclaimed.

"*Que barbaridad!*" ("How barbarous!") echoed Pancho.

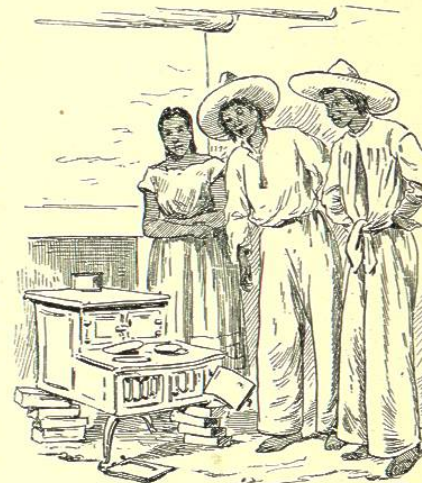
"*Por supuesto que sí!*" ("Well, I should say so!"), quoth the *cargador*.

"*Pos como no!*" ("Well, I'd like to know why it isn't!"), said the disgusted Pancho.

"She will never get a cook to use it, never!" The cook came into the *patio* to inspect the stove, and she too spoke in a low voice to the men, but folding her arms and emphatically raising her tone on the last word "*el higado*," which explained itself later.

As there was not a flue in the building, the stove was placed in

the little fire-place. It had only two feet, which stood diagonally opposite each other, causing the stove to nod and bend in a grim, diabolic way. Being duly settled on its own responsibility by the aid of bricks, Pancho opened one of the doors, when instantly it lay full length on the floor. He walked away, looking back in disgust on the wreck. I ventured to touch the door on the opposite side, when, as if by magic, it, also, took a position on



"IT WILL GIVE ME DISEASE OF THE LIVER."

the floor as *vis-à-vis*; the servants exclaiming: "*Muy mal hecho!*" ("A very bad make, or job!"), "*tan viejo!*" ("so very old!")

"*Pos como no!*" ("Well, I should say so!") they all chimed in, the cook glancing at me suspiciously, and folding her arms as she added: "No, señora, I cannot use the *estufa*."

"Why not?" I asked.

"*Porque me hace daño en el higado.*"

"Because it will give me disease of the liver; Mexican servants dislike stoves, and if you keep this one, no cook will stay here," she replied.

A blacksmith was called to renovate the treasure, but he also worked on the *mañana* system, taking weeks to do his best, and still leaving the stove dilapidated. The cook took her departure, and on Pancho's solicitation dozens came, but a glance at the stove was enough.

Politeness ruled their lives, and native courtesy was stronger than love of truth. Without saying a word about the stove, they would say, "I would like to work for you—you are *muy amable—muy simpática*—amiable and agreeable; but,"—her voice running up to a piping treble—she would add, "*tengo mi familia*"—I have my family—or, "I am now occupied," meaning employed, by Don or Doña Such-a-one.

Pancho always looked on with keen interest during such conversations, his face saying, without a word: "I told you so; these cooks will never adopt your *costumbres Americanos*."

The stove was always falling, or some part dropping off.

At last one day I went in and saw it careened to one side—both feet off—and both doors down, suggesting that some canny hand had dismantled it. The wreck presented a picture painfully realistic; but before I time to inquire as to the perpetrator, the stove addressed me:

"I was once an American citizen, bred and born. My pedigree is equal to any of your boasted latter-day ancestry. A residence of twenty years in Mexico has changed my habitudes and customs. You need not try to mend and fix me up—to erect your American household gods on my inanimate form. I am a naturalized Mexican, with all that is implied. I have had my freedom the greater portion of the time since they bought me from a broken-down *gringo*; for neither the señora nor the cooks would use me. I'll do you no good; if you mend and fix me up in one place, I'll break down in another. Content yourself with our *braseros* (ranges) and pottery. Accept our usages, and you will be happy in our country.

"You need not wonder at my rust-eaten and battered condition. I have lain undisturbed in the corral for nearly twenty years. During the rainy season, when the big drops pelted me unmercifully, snakes, lizards, centipedes, and tarantulas came habitually to take refuge inside my iron doors. So many different natures coming in close contact, there were frequently serious collisions. These warlike engagements have crippled and maimed me, more than the weather, or any service I have rendered. You will not find a cook who will even know how to make me hot for your use. Take me back to the corral! Take me back!"