

On going to the kitchen a little later, I was surprised to see the gentle Jesusita seated in the middle of the floor, by a charcoal fire, with all my pottery vessels in a heap beside her. Meats, vegetables, and water were all at hand, and she was busily engaged in preparations for dinner. I told her to come and see how well she could cook on that American machine, but she only answered, "*No es costumbre*;" besides, "Don Juan Bautista said it would give her the *enfermedad*, or sickness, before mentioned—and no man knew more than he"—which meant I should use my own machine.

I called upon Don Juan Bautista to go with me to market, when he at once entered into a lengthy discourse about ladies going to such

places; that the *jente decente* (people of pedigree) never did such things; that "the people in the streets and markets would talk much and say many things." But of this I had already had a foretaste.

I was about to lead the way through the big door, when Jesusita came forward and laid her soft hand upon me, saying: "Señora, *do not go*; Juan knows better than you about such business. In this country ladies like you send the *mozo*." But I was proof against her persuasive eloquence. To surrender my entire nationality and individuality was not possible for a good American.

The pair talked aside in low undertone, which I watched with feigned indifference and half-closed eyes. Jesusita glanced commiseratively at me, as if she had used her best efforts to no purpose;



A HUNGRY PURCHASER.

but Don Juan Bautista threw his most determined and unrelenting expression upon me, as if to say: "Well, she has had enough warning; now the responsibility rests on her own shoulders!"

He looked back at Jesusita as he stepped from the door, nodding his head—"Well,—I will go; but she will wish she had not gone!"

In the market Juan Bautista never left me for a moment, inspecting closely everything I bought—now and then throwing in a word when he thought I was paying too much. He counted every cent as fast as I paid it out, and noted every article placed in the basket. I had nearly completed my purchases, and was talking to a woman about the prospect for butter—regretting the difficulty of getting it,—when she leaned across the table, waggling that tireless forefinger at me, saying, "*En este tiempo ya no hay, no es costumbre*" ("At this time of the year there is none"), Juan Bautista chiming in (with the interminable waggle of his forefinger also), "*No! no hay!*" ("No, indeed, there is none").

The last purchase was made, and I was about closing my purse, when glancing up, I saw Juan Bautista's great merciless eyes fixed upon me, while he said in a firm voice: "But, *mi pilon, Señora!*" This is the custom of the country. If you stay at home, I get my *pilon* from the merchants and market people; if you come—I must have it anyhow. A wrangle was impossible, and handing him *dos reales* (twenty-five cents), I went home a far wiser woman.



NO! NO HAY: (THERE IS NONE.)

Jesusita looked proudly upon the towering form of Juan Bautista as he entered the portal—basket in one hand, *dos reales* in the other. Not a word was spoken between them, but looks told volumes. She knew what Juan could do, and he had proved to her his ability to cope with the stranger from any part of the world. To myself I confessed

that in Don Juan Bautista I had found a foeman worthy of my steel.

I asked him to light the fire in the stove and I would make another effort to instruct Jesusita in its management. He went about it, while I withdrew for a few moments to my room. Very soon I noticed that the house was full of smoke. Supposing it to be on fire, I ran to the kitchen, which was in a dense fog, but no fire visible. Nor was Jesusita or Don Juan Bautista to be found. The cause of the smoke was soon discovered. He had built the fire in the oven, and closed the doors!

I clapped my hands for them, according to custom; but they came not. I then found them sitting in the shady court; Jesusita's right arm lay confidently on Juan Bautista's big left shoulder, as she looked up entreatingly at the harsh countenance of the arbiter of her fate.

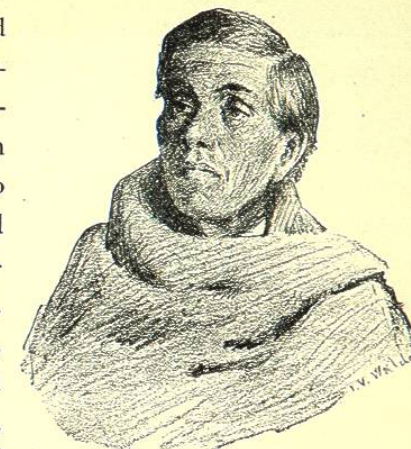
I gleaned from their conversation that she wished to remain, but her *marido* was evidently bent on going. On my approach they rose politely, and Juan Bautista delivered the valedictory, assuring me in pleasant terms of their good-will; and it was not the *pilon* business—that had been settled—but the certainty that Jesusita's health would be injured by using the cooking-stove decided him.

He said they would go to their "*pobre casa*"—I knew they had none; then gathering up their goods and chattels, with the unvarying politeness of the country, "*Hasta otro vista*" ("Until I see you again"), "*Vaya V. con Dios!*" ("May God be with you!"), they stepped lightly over the threshold—looked up and down the street, uncertain which way to go—then out they went into the great busy world. Thus disappeared forever from my sight Pancho's *comadrita*.

In every new servant we employed new characteristics were developed. All agreed in their leading *costumbres*, yet differed in the manner of carrying them into effect, while their quaintness and individuality afforded me constant entertainment. Some came humbly, giving only one name, while others used much formality, never failing to give the prefix Don or Doña.

Their names were as puzzling as their hereditary customs. I found

that while the Southern negro had been shrewd in appropriating the names of such great men as George Washington, Henry Clay, and Thomas Jefferson, the Mexican servants had likewise availed themselves of the names of their own great men. I hired Miguel Hidalgo twice, Porfirio Diaz once, Manuel Gonzales three times, as also numerous others. But when a little, old, weazened, solemn-looking man, with a face as sanctimonious as an Aztec deity, wanted employment, and gave his name as "Pio Quinto" (Pius V.), assuring me he would guard well my front door, he quite took my breath away.



PIO QUINTO (PIUS V.) AS A DOOR-KEEPER.

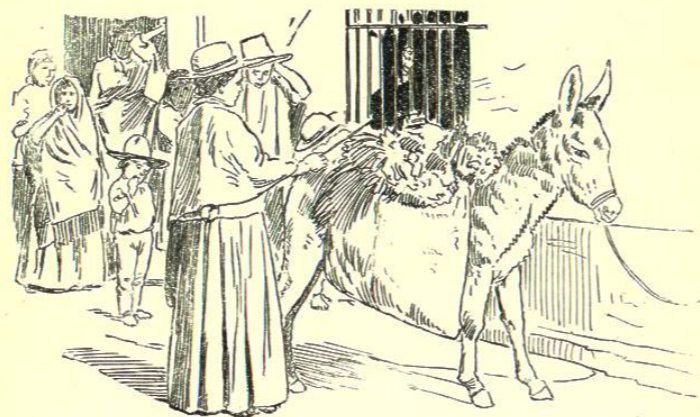
Among the many who came immediately under my observation was a newly married pair who had walked a hundred miles, seeking employment. They had neither beds nor bedding; nor, in fact, anything save the soiled, tattered clothing they wore.

The wife's name was Juanita, and knowing that Juan meant John, I then supposed that the addition of the *ita*, signifying little, made it Little John; but a further knowledge of names and idioms revealed the fact that Juana was Jane, and Juanita little Jane. But I began by calling her Little John, and so continued as long as she was in my employ. The diminutive was peculiarly appropriate. I see her now—this patient, docile, helpful child-woman. Her wealth of shining black hair hung in a long plait; her eyes, soft, yet glowing with a strange, peculiar, half-human, half-animal fire.

When the *rebozo* fell from her shoulders, a dainty figure was revealed—the contour exquisitely rounded. Her hand and arm would have delighted an artist for a model. Her step on the stone floor was light and free—noiseless as that of a kitten. Her voice was plaintive, sweet, and low, accompanied by a manner so gentle, so humble—ex-

pressing without saying, "May I do something for you?" If I were sick, Little John would take her place on the floor by the bedside, hold my hands, stroking them tenderly, bathe my brow and feet, murmuring in pathetic tones, "*Mi pobre Señora!*" ("My poor lady or madame"), which finally died away on half-parted lips, with "*Pobrecita!*" ("Poor little thing!")

I was curious about her family ties, and asked her of her people, a hundred miles away. "Have you a father and mother?" said I one day. The little form swayed back and forth. She made a low wail—the most pitiful heart-cry—a smothered pent-up sob, laden with



A STREET SCENE.

all the griefs of Little John's orphaned life. With tearful eyes and bowed head, clasping my hands, she wailed out again and again, "*Muertos!*" ("Dead!") "*No tengo mas que mi marido!*" ("I have only my husband"). The poor little creature's story was told.

In consideration of my many difficulties in this line, I was glad to give them employment, when, according to custom, they solicited a portion of their wages in advance. Having received it, the wife, ignoring her own great needs, bought material for clothing for her husband. She borrowed my scissors; and I, curious to see how she would manage the cutting, went to her room to note the process.

As thought Pancho about "fingers having been made before knives

and forks," so thought this young *pobre* about seats, as she sat, tailor fashion, on the dirt floor.

Such measuring and calculating as she had, in order to get two shirts out of three yards and a half! I laughed until I cried over her dilemma, as well as over the solicitude of her spouse about the result. He was evidently deeply interested.

She was only fourteen years of age, which gave an additional interest and a touching pathos to her anxious devotion. I thought to myself: "Woman-like, you will give your last farthing, take sleep from your eyes, even die, for the man you love!"

She finally cut out the shirts, the material being heavy brown domestic, and with the same untiring earnestness drew threads, made tiny tucks in the bosom, and when they were completed, brought them to me for inspection. More exquisite stitching or more perfectly made garments I never saw; but, as might be imagined, they would have been a close fit on a mere boy. This, however, was no impediment to the enthusiastic zeal of this interesting pair, and the shirts were duly worn by his lordship.

All the money which they earned jointly, with commendable unselfishness on her part went for his adornment, she continuing, with the aid of a calico dress which I gave her, the possessor of one suit and a half. With the same ever predominating feminine instinct, shoes were purchased for the husband; and very soon he was strutting about the premises as if monarch of all he surveyed.

In every possible way he made pretexts for errands that he might show off his clothes. His peacock strut was inimitably funny, and caused me unending amusement, though the smile was often checked by the thought of the poor little wife's unselfishness. The heart of woman is, after all, everywhere the same, and too frequently her devotion must be its own and sole reward.

One of his edicts was, that his wife should not dress fowls. The custom of skinning instead of plucking fowls exists in Mexico. But I was leaving nothing untried to have everything done according to my notions. One day, when he was detained away for several hours,

I ordered a pair of chickens for dinner, and directed poor Little Johnny how to prepare them. Without remonstrance she went willingly at the task; but before the chickens were ready for cooking, *señor*, the husband, returned.

I was watching with bated breath, feeling sure there would be a tempest. He did not intend I should witness the *dénouement*, but I was determined to see the fun.

Without speaking audibly, he passed by where she was standing, wrenched from her hands the partly dressed fowls, and in a moment more disappeared in the *corral*.

I took another route to find my chickens, and instinct led me to the spot. On going to the carriage-house, I found them with strong cords tied around their necks, suspended from the old vehicle. By hanging the poor dead chickens, he retaliated for my presumption in directing his wife to prepare them without his consent and in his absence.

My curiosity next led me to see whether he had hanged his wife, or was erecting a gallows for me. Searching about the garden and out-houses, I found the couple in an unfrequented walk. She was wringing her hands and crying, while he stood bolt upright, bestowing upon her every severe expression and word of chastisement at his command. His jetty, straight hair stood up all over his head, his eyes glittered with rage, his brown lips were white, and his teeth champed viciously! All this was accompanied by the popping of his fists together, in the most



"OH! FORGIVE ME, I'LL NEVER DO SO AGAIN."

effective manner. Every time this tragic part of the perform-

ance was executed, she would jump, and give a fresh howl of agony over the disobedience she had so innocently practiced, saying: "*Perdóname, no lo vuelvo á hacer*" ("Oh, forgive me, I won't do it again").

The end of all this was that they took up their pallets of maguey and walked, leaving me to a pious meditation on the frailties and foibles of human nature in general, and on the peculiarities of Mexican servants in particular; and also to the disagreeable necessity of cutting the chickens down, and preparing my dinner single-handed.

The meek little wife, guarded by her grim liege, looked back at me askant, slyly kissed her hand, and smiled. This was the last I saw of Juanita.

The *mozo*, of all the various servants, was daily becoming more and more a vexatious problem. Indispensable, but to the last degree puzzling, I was anxious to know at what point in my experience the tolerated or "customary" labors of this individual would be introduced. The time had now come when, as I feared, his entire vocabulary would narrow down to this one familiar sentence, "*No es costumbre*," and he would assume the immovable and useless position of a mere figure-head. My imagination was wrought to an exalted state of anticipation, and I knew not what a day would bring forth. Every day carried me nearer to the time of Mother Noah, and to a world of chance. Wood, when not in small pieces and sold from the backs of burros, brought root, branch, and top, on ancient carts with wooden wheels, larger than the Aztec calendar; dogs called "Sal" regardless of sex; the yellow of the egg white; corn husks sold by the hundred; vinegar from France; and the tomato, our delicious vegetable, here assuming the masculine prefix he-tomato (spelled *jitomati*); all these things formed a grotesque panorama of curious contradictions all safely fortified behind the cast-iron "*Costumbres*."