

CHAPTER IV.

We were no sooner installed in our quarters in Zacatecas, than a small but important person, clothed in imitation American attire, with a hat all too wide for his shrunk brain, made his appearance. "Señor, Señora," he said. "I am interpreter. I spik the Spanish, I spik also the Inglis. I am at your service. Can I do some tings for you?"

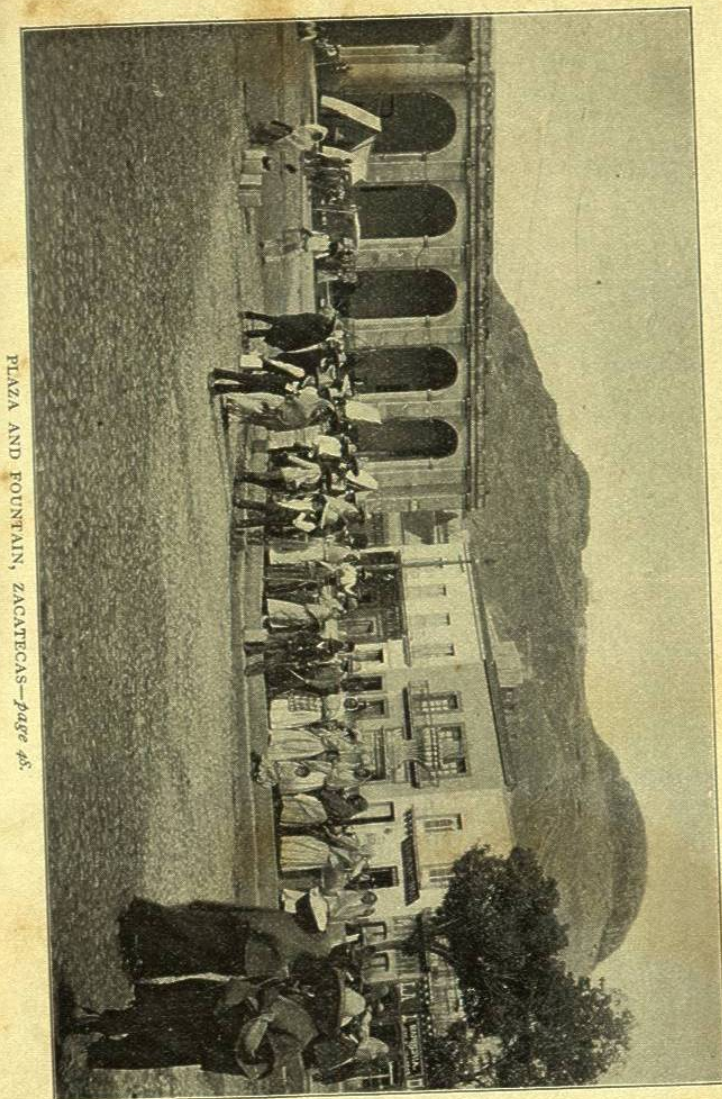
"Yes," I replied. "You can get me some blue glasses. I have broken mine, and this glare blinds me."

The interpreter regarded me for a moment, doubtfully, then he placed his dingy hand on his heart, with a reverent inclination, and said, "Señora, at your service. I go."

He was gone the greater part of the day. When he returned he bore in his arms a number of small packages wrapped in newspaper. He carefully unwrapped the little parcels and placed the contents in a row on the table.

"Señora," he said apologetically, "I find not many

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blue glasses; but the Señora may be pleased to like the white glasses; therefore I bring also the white."

I looked at the row of tiny objects, and then walked to the window to conceal a smile. The poor fellow had succeeded in obtaining a quantity of little wine-glasses, some blue, some white. There is not a town in the United States where so curious a collection could have been found. I explained to him, as gently as I could, what I wished, and he rushed away enthusiastically. In a short time he returned with an assortment of goggles that made me shiver, but I selected the most unobtrusive, and wore them as a penance all winter.

The morning after our arrival in Zacatecas I arose, took my usual cold bath, and in a few moments was in the throes of sciatica. I could not move an eyelash without acute anguish. We were in despair, but I put a brave face on the matter, assuring Ahasuerus that I would soon get well by "the light of nature." But the day wore on, and the light of nature seemed to be snuffed out.

"We must have a doctor," said Ahasuerus. "You can't have a fit of sickness in this God-forsaken town."

"I decline to have a serape and sombrero doctor," I retorted despairingly. "He'd give me cactus tea and powdered lizard." However, Ahasuerus was firm, and the landlord was summoned.

"Monsieur," I demanded plaintively, "do you know of a good doctor?"

"Mais, oui Madame," responded the landlord, in his fat-tongued French, "I know a docteur magnifique. He has recovered me when I go to die of the ill in the head."

"All right," exclaimed Ahasuerus, cheerfully. "He's just the fellow I want. What's his address?" he continued, taking out his note-book.

"Comment, Monsieur?"

"Where does this doctor live?"

"In Bayonne, Monsieur. It makes itself near to the border of Spain. He is a great docteur."

Ahasuerus glared wrathfully at the landlord, but the landlord's fat face was impenetrable.

"But do you know no doctor in Zacatecas, Monsieur?" I queried. "I am ill and must have a physician."

"That is great damage," announced the landlord, plaintively. "Madame is ill and takes not the air of Zacatecas."

My private opinion was that Madame had taken too much both of the air and the water of Zacatecas. However, I mildly responded: "Perfectly, Monsieur; you are right. Do you not know a doctor in Zacatecas—a good doctor—who will cure me so that I can get out and see your beautiful city before I leave it?"

"Mais, Si, Madame," with renewed confidence. "I know a docteur very good. He is pharmacien" (druggist).

"A pharmacien? But does he know anything about diseases?"

"Certainement. Madame will tell him that she has a maladie, and then he will know that she is ill, and he will give her an ordonnance" (prescription). "He is bon pharmacien, bon docteur—pour les chevaux" (for the horses).

"A horse doctor?" Ahasuerus and I groaned in concert.

"But, landlord," I protested, "there surely must be some other doctor in town. Can't you tell us of any real doctor?"

"Pardonnez-moi, Madame," replied the landlord, grudgingly, as if at last compelled to reveal a sacred trust. "I know a docteur sage, O, très sage. But he is Germain."

"Very well; I like German doctors; the best doctor I ever had was a German. Does he speak French or English?"

"Madame, the good docteur knows all—all; he is dentista."

"Dentista? But I don't want a dentist; there is nothing the matter with my teeth. I have the rheumatism."

"What is it that I tell you? It is that the good docteur knows all."

"I vote for the dentista," pronounced Ahasuerus, decidedly. "Where can I find him?"

"Monsieur, I send to seek him; Voilà; I haste myself—I run."

Monsieur Jean "hasted himself" with such good results that within the half hour a gentle knock at the door announced the coming of the dentista. Ahasuerus opened the door. An alert, bright-eyed man, in the conventional American dress, appeared, greeted us in perfect English, and in a minute, with quick professional tact, was master of the situation.

"You are in perfect health, except that you suffer," he said. "Why have you the sciatica?"

"I am sure I cannot tell, doctor."

"Did you take a cold bath this morning?"

"Yes; but that didn't hurt me any; I am accustomed to it."

"Nevertheless, that is the cause of the trouble. I have known cold baths to be fatal in Zacatecas. We are more than 8,000 feet above the sea, and evaporation is so rapid that a chill is almost certain to follow a cold bath. The only safe bath here is a hot one, taken at bedtime. The Zacatecans, who know their climate, are said to bathe but twice—once before their first communion, and again

after they are dead. Can you take bad-tasting medicine?"

"I can take anything, doctor."

"Good! A model patient. I will send you a Mexican draught that will taste vilely, but I will promise you that you will be well enough to-morrow to walk down to my office and see my new electrical apparatus and the X-ray machine that I have just brought from New York."

The Mexican draught soon arrived in a black junk bottle that had a decidedly disreputable appearance. From the smell and the taste it might have been prescribed by the horse doctor himself. Nevertheless it did its work, and the next day I was able to take the twelve-mile trip to Guadalupe, and to visit the doctor in his cozy bachelor quarters overlooking the Cathedral plaza; and there, in that far-off benighted land, I, a citizen of the United States, and a so-called progressive woman, made my first acquaintance with the X-ray.

As we walked away from the doctor's office—to quote his own words—"no longer patients, but friends"—we spoke sorrowfully of his exile in that far-away land—an exile necessary for climatic reasons, and endured cheerfully and courageously. And we said to each other, "After all, the best missionary is an intelligent and conscientious physician; for surely there is no mission more holy or

more Christ-like than the blessed mission of healing."

As we left Zacatecas, Monsieur Jean delivered the following valedictory: "You see; what is it that I tell you? It is that at my house you have all things. You desire the water of minerals—behold the bon Vichy. You wish the glass of blue—it is yours. You demand the good docteur—he is equally at your service. All things you have in my house. Monsieur, Madame, are you content?"

And we were content.

CHAPTER V.

It is well, if possible, to leave Zacatecas by daylight, for, as the train winds up the mountains, there is a charming view of the verdant bowl in which the city lies. The distance to Aguas Calientes is about seventy-five miles, and the scenery along the road, when the dust is not too thick, is thoroughly enjoyable. The Hotel Washington in Aguas Calientes is, Mexican fashion, more than a mile from the station, but the mule-car ride through the quaint, narrow streets is well worth taking.

Aguas Calientes—warm waters—is noted for its baths. The best springs are those near the railway station, where for twenty-five centavos one can have a refreshing bath with the added luxury of a sheet, a towel, a little wash-rag resembling a bird's nest, made of the fiber of the cactus, and a soap tablet. These little tablets make a snowy lather, and are very healing to the skin, and one really wonders why the Mexicans are so wedded to dirt when they have such superior soap. The bathrooms, which are cold cells with stone floors, and stone steps leading down into the tubs set beneath the floor, are

not so satisfactory as the baths themselves. The velvety soft water is said to be good for rheumatism, and I believe it, for Ahasuerus and I, after the first trial of it, promptly became confirmed rheumatics.

The Grand Baths, which are about a half-mile east of the station, are open-air baths. They are named for the apostles, and one can take a St. Peter, a St. John or a St. Mark, as best pleases him. They are of different temperatures, but all hot. From the spring at the Grand Baths runs a steaming brook which is used by the poorer people both for laundry and bath-house. The women are always washing on the stones, and sometimes they are sporting in the water. In spite, however, of the glowing romances of the guide-books, we saw nothing fascinatingly improper in these public baths. For studies in the nude, Mexico, as compared to Cuba, offers few advantages. Indeed, we saw nothing in Aguas Calientes that the traveler cannot see at the springs in southern France or Italy.

There is a fine Cathedral at Aguas Calientes and some good churches, all of which contain creditable pictures by a dead and gone local artist—Juan de Lopez by name. In front of the Cathedral is the plaza of San Marcos, which is beautiful—for a tropical park. The parks of the southern lands are never so beautiful as those of our own climate, for dusty orange trees and grassless reaches of white

sand do not charm the eye as do our great elms and velvety slopes of greensward. In the park we met a Mexican school-boy of sixteen studying his German grammar under the trees. He greeted us with graceful and unaffected cordiality, and seemed to take great delight in our society. He explained that, although Americans came often to Aguas Calientes, and a few were residents of the city, he seldom had an opportunity to speak at length with them. This boy was a pupil in a private school and was studying to be a civil engineer. He told us that the professional men in Mexico are required by the schools to speak English, and that the study of the language is creeping even into the municipal schools. Our young friend himself spoke English slowly but correctly.

As we came from the park our attention was attracted by a peculiar humming noise. We followed the sound, and found ourselves in one of the municipal or common schools. The Mexican scholars have a way of studying aloud in a half-chant, half-buzz, that is very nerve-racking, and that makes of the school-room a perfect bedlam. In the distance this buzz resembles that of an invading army of grasshoppers.

The Hotel Washington, like many other Mexican hotels, is only one story in height. The long-grated windows of our room encroached upon the side-

walk, so that all the busy life of the streets passed before us, and I could almost touch the little burros as they ambled by. We went one day with a friendly countrywoman to see the house she was fitting up for a home in the city. American ingenuity and American principles of sanitation were making an ideal habitation of the Mexican dwelling. The rooms, of course, all opened on the sunny paved court, and the startling innovations of fireplaces and bathrooms had been introduced. We climbed to the housetop, an important feature of Mexican homes, and we heartily indorsed the schemes of the prudent mistress for strengthening the roof. Certainly the heavy stone roofs of the Spanish-American buildings, which too often rest upon rotted supports of wood, must be a danger to the people. In the kitchen through which we strolled, the range consisted of two little basin-shaped grates for the burning of charcoal, which were inserted in the cooking table.

Of course every one who goes to Aguas Calientes buys drawn-work, which is cheaper and better there than in the City of Mexico. As we were strolling near the depot, one day, an American excursion train came in. In an instant the tourists were besieged by the drawn-work venders, and many a sharp bargain was driven before the train pulled out. It is well for buyers to remember that the work

should be done on a good quality of linen, and that the long-thread stitches are neither durable nor desirable.



EXCURSIONISTS BUYING DRAWN-WORK.